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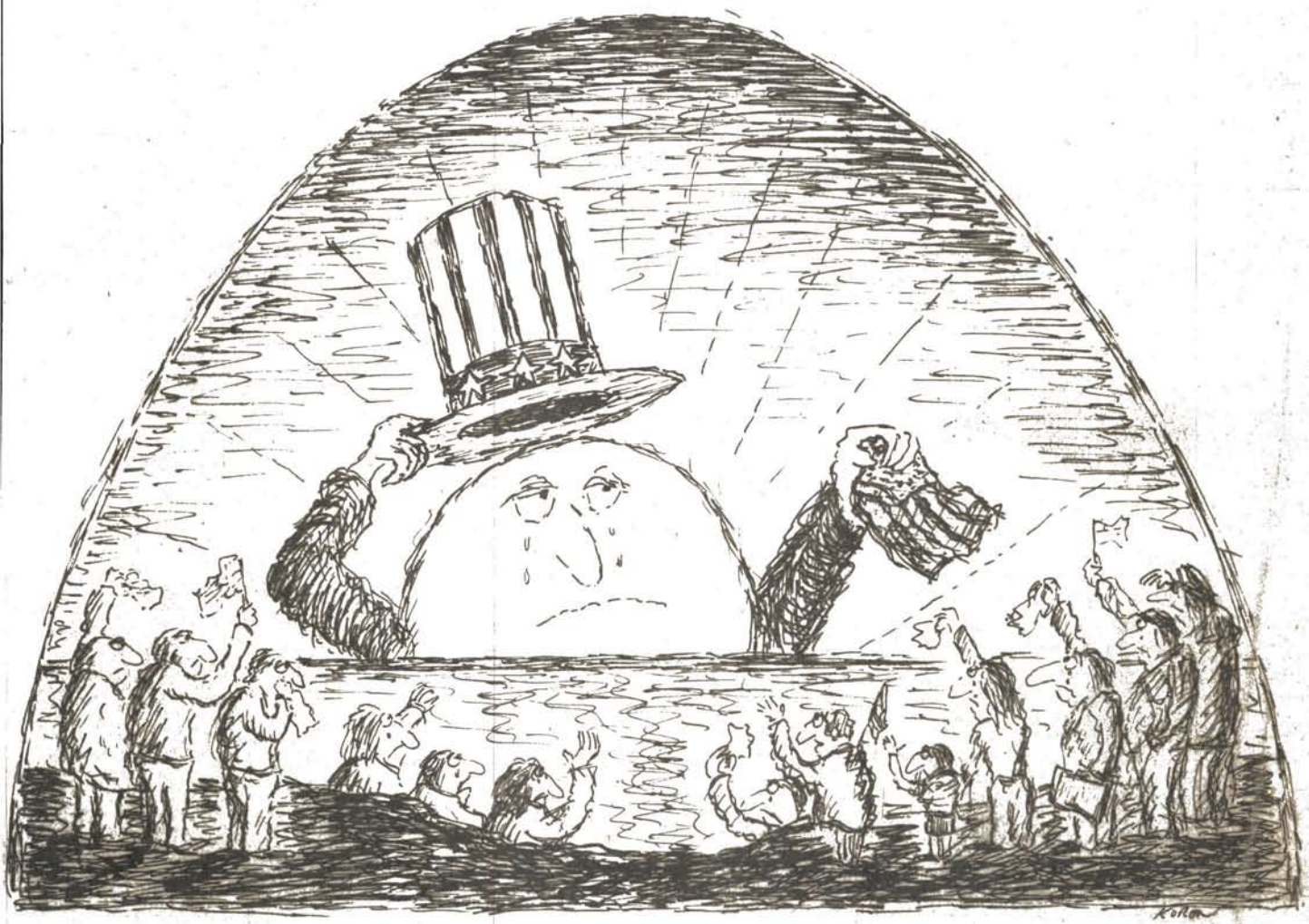
Is the Idea and Reality of America Possible Without Empire?

By William Appleman Williams



A HISTORY LESSON FOR THE DELEGATES TO THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

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LETTERS.

Below are a few of the many letters received on the Presidential candidates. We regret that we cannot print them all.
—The Editors

THERE IS A DIFFERENCE

Washington

. . . Ronald Reagan's remarks in the May 6 *Wall Street Journal* that he would provide Angolan rebels with weapons, like his beliefs that the Panama Canal treaties were a sellout and that the United States should have stood by the Shah of Iran and Anastasio Somoza to the bitter end, reveal a mind chiefly animated by a naïve bellicosity and unencumbered by any extensive acquaintance with world politics. Given the primitive and simplistic character of his views and the desperate and complex nature of the problems we are likely to confront in the 1980s, the election of Reagan as President is, or ought to be, a genuinely frightening prospect. Especially to liberals.

But, strangely enough, it does not seem to be. *The New Republic* and *The Nation* disagree on many issues, but not on making Jimmy Carter their first target. In this, they mirror many of their readers, who devote their argumentative energies to lambasting Carter for his every major and minor transgression and to forgiving John Anderson for most of his twenty-year career in Congress. Meanwhile, Reagan has chosen a moderate running mate, is consolidating his position within a united party and is preparing a campaign calculated to appeal to restive Democratic and independent social conservatives.

It is one thing for liberals to argue that their preferred candidate is Anderson, and that they will vote for him if the polls reveal that he has a chance to win. It is quite another to state, as many liberals do, that they are for Anderson come what may, and that there is no distinction between Carter and Reagan meaningful enough to affect their vote. The latter position is almost willful folly. ful folly.

Carter is for SALT II; Reagan is opposed to it. Carter is for the Equal Rights Amendment; Reagan is against it. Reagan wants to ban abortion; Carter is against any constitutional amendment to forbid it. Carter's judicial and middle- and upper-level bureaucratic appointments have been consistently liberal; Reagan's would be diametrically the opposite. Carter has preserved Alaska and Federal Western lands from "rape, ruin and run" development; Reagan would open up Alaska and sell Federal lands. Though you wouldn't know it from reading the liberal magazines, the last three years have witnessed large increases in most kinds of social spending. . . . Reagan would not attempt merely to slow down the rate of increase of such spending, for which Carter is denounced by the left, but rather would propose spending less in actual terms. . . . On the overwhelming majority of issues upon which Congress has had to vote, Carter's has been a moderate liberal Administration. And if you are a liberal, a moderate liberal administration ought to beat a conservative administration.

Liberals will usually admit the validity of these comparisons, but find the President *personally* objectionable. He is guilty of hypocrisy, or moralizing, or double-dealing, or indecisiveness, or most importantly, incompetence.

Well, what of it? The choice is not between Carter and an idealized liberal alternative but, assuming Anderson fades, between Carter and Reagan. And I for one would rather live with Carter's singsong diction, sickly smile and ideological inconsistency for four years than with Reagan's Supreme Court appointments, Interior Department, welfare "reforms" and positions on abortion and school prayer, not to mention the chance of an American expeditionary force to El Salvador and the excitement of a guaranteed no-holds-barred arms race.

Senator Edward Kennedy's campaign gave liberals their chance to defeat the President. They failed to do so. . . . Meaningless warfare over the Democratic Party platform in New York or reprehensible attempts to induce delegates to betray their commitments will only fatally weaken the Democratic Party in the face of the formidable challenge from Reagan and George Bush.

To state what ought to be obvious, 1980 is a conservative year. . . . The most liberal President it is possible to elect this year is Jimmy Carter. If liberals, by their actions or inactions, help to defeat Carter and thus to elect Reagan, there are some of us who will be disinclined to pay much attention to their complaints over the next four years.

Peter Connolly

KENNEDY SHOULD RECEIVE

Phoenix

Senator Edward Kennedy, as "The Trashing of Teddy" [Ronnie Dugger, *The Nation*, June 21] showed, is a man of the people. And as the article pointed out, he fought for the poverty-stricken, the unemployed and so many other worthy causes of great value to our country. His record shows that he is one of the most outstanding senators ever to serve in our Senate.

If enough people read that article, *he should receive* the Democratic nomination for President. If he is nominated he will be elected President. If he is elected President he will bring our country out of the difficulties and troubles from which it is suffering. He will be an outstanding President and will give us the leadership our country badly needs.

Renz L. Jennings, Justice
Arizona Supreme Court (Retired)

ANDERSON ONLY DECENT

Andes, N.Y.

Liberals who are opposed to John Anderson because he is a "true conservative" or simply run-of-the-mill, or because he is a "plain, old-fashioned, orthodox Republican" or just any old Republican ought to recognize that, while 50 percent of the voters may prefer anything to the Carter-Reagan nonchoice, a still greater number of eligible Americans have opted out of the political process altogether primarily because of the failure of that process to present men of integrity for the highest office in the land. . . .

As James Storrow pointed out ["The Anderson Candidacy," *The Nation*, May 17], though a conservative, Anderson is decently so, as though these were antipodal. In a world where competition for oil constitutes the gravest threat to world peace, to favor the only immediately practical alternative energy source (nuclear) cannot be written off as simply wrongheaded. . . .

The salient fact is that John Anderson is the only standard around which people of decency, whether they like to think of themselves as liberal or conservative, can rally in this fateful year of 1980. That such a candidacy may open the door that conventional politics has closed on millions of Americans could be what ultimately saves democracy in America.

Malcolm Monroe

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EDITORIALS.

Empire's Fate

Why on the eve of the Democratic Party's convention do we offer the delegates and our readers an essay on our life as an empire? Isn't it too late for a history lesson? Wouldn't it be more timely to analyze the significant differences between the Edward Kennedy and Jimmy Carter platforms and the political morality of Carter's "offer" to compromise his proposed platform plans in exchange for Kennedy's withdrawal as a candidate? What do the candidates propose to do about unemployment (the Administration projects nearly nine million people out of work by Election Day) and inflation (food, fuel, health and housing costs rose by 17.6 percent last year)? How do they propose to guarantee (and more importantly, how do they *define*) our internal security? Does it really require a bloated defense budget and incursions on our civil liberties?

Critical questions all, and some of them may indeed be discussed at the Democratic convention, but we believe that the context within which the Democrats have gathered ostensibly to debate the issues (not to mention the candidates) precludes their solution.

In the weeks ahead, there will be time enough to consider the alternative candidacies, such as Barry Commoner's and John Anderson's. But for now, it seems to us that since none of the party's own candidates or platform writers has managed to identify what William Appleman Williams has called the "crunch" issue, the underlying assumption whose invisibility bedevils our politics, the highest service we could perform would be to share with the Democratic delegates and our readers his astonishing analysis. Professor Williams, President of the Organization of American Historians, presumes, in his essay on the meaning and imperatives of our national life as an empire, not merely to redefine our past but to

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force us to imagine our future—and to begin, not on some distant day, but *now*, unless we are prepared to risk empire's fate, to "sizzle or suffocate." For if Williams is right, only *after* we come to terms with our life as an empire can we begin the vital work of internal reconstruction and forge domestic and foreign policies consistent with our needs as a democracy.

In devoting this special convention issue to Williams's historical manifesto (which will appear in expanded form as a book in the fall) are we, one might finally ask, oblivious to the charge that such long-range focuses are helping to elect Ronald Reagan as our next President? Not at all. We know only too well that Reagan, who prefers to convey the congenial impression that he is an empty vessel, devoid of potent ideological serum, is in fact the compromise candidate of the Republican Party's ascendant New Right, and that although the Republicans are currently engaged in a quiet battle for Ronald Reagan's soul, whichever faction wins, it is bad news for America.

The "moderate" on the Reagan ticket is, after all, none other than Trilateralist George Bush, who, no kidding, told Robert Scheer last January his thoughts on how to be a "winner" in an all-out nuclear war!

But this week, it seems less important to focus on the differences between Carter and Reagan than on the limitations of their sameness. We reserve the right, as the candidates reveal themselves through their campaigns, their rhetoric, their vision, to have more to say and to rethink this position down the road, but for now we agree with Alan Wolfe, one of those we have asked to comment on Williams, when he writes, "Carter has become a demagogue who knows better, while Reagan is a demagogue who doesn't."

Whitewashed Oil

The Carter Administration, in whitewashing the big oil companies' responsibility for the horrendous gasoline lines of 1979, has apparently adopted the philosophy that if it didn't play the first time in Peoria, just try, try again. Last summer, with evidence mounting that the gasoline "crisis" was contrived to drive prices higher [see Fred J. Cook, "How Big Oil Turned Off the Gas," *The Nation,* July 28-August 4, 1979], President Jimmy Carter sternly ordered the Justice Department and the Department of Energy to investigate the charges. The D.O.E.'s report, exculpating the big oil companies, became an instant embarrassment. It blamed everything on the cutoff of Iranian oil—the much-ballyhooed "Iranian shortfall"—but an investigation by *The Washington Post* established conclusively that the report had been compiled without any real investigation and was, in fact, nothing more than "a propaganda exercise."

Instead of blowing his Presidential stack at having been delivered such a phony piece of goods, President Carter lapsed into silence about the matter. Almost a year passed—and then, on July 17, the Justice and Energy Departments filed reports that were ostensibly pure, pristine endeavors. Just like playing a cracked record on the old Victrola, they resurrected the tune of "the Iranian shortfall" and held Big Oil blameless.

The key to this second-time-around conclusion is probably contained in this paragraph in the Justice Department report: "In summary, the United States experienced a deficit in crude oil imports in the first nine months of 1979 because of a world crude shortage and that shortage was, in large part, the result of the Iranian production cutback."

This statement defies all the evidence in every official study that did not emanate from the oil-controlled D.O.E. or, as one Congressional investigator described them, "the eunuchs" in the Justice Department. The critical period was, of course, not the first nine months, but the first four months of 1979, when the gas lines developed. An item-by-item listing of other official studies reveals the Carter Administration's Big Oil bias. For example:

§ A Federal Trade Commission study showed that, depending on the month taken for comparison, U.S. gasoline supplies were up from 4 to 8 percent during the first four months of 1979 compared with 1978.

§ Customs figures showed that imports during the first five months actually increased 10 percent over 1978.

§ The Central Intelligence Agency reported that free-world oil production in the first quarter of 1979 had *increased* over 1978 and that imports in the first five months outstripped those of 1978. In the critical first quarter, C.I.A. figures showed imports averaged more than eight million barrels a day. In 1978 this figure had been reached in only two of the first five months.

§ A study by Cathryn Goddard and J. D. Polash, Treasury Department experts, showed that "the Iranian shortfall" had been more than offset by increased production elsewhere. In fact, they concluded, Big Oil actually benefited from the cutoff of Iranian oil because the new replacement crudes were of better quality, could be processed more cheaply and yielded higher quantities of gasoline. "Iran's shortfall in exports has not produced any real shortage of crude in the United States," they stated flatly. Then-Secretary of the Treasury Michael Blumenthal smothered the report, and Goddard, its principal architect, was forced out of Government service.

§ Terence O'Rourke, energy adviser to anti-inflation chief Alfred Kahn, found, in an exhaustively documented report, that "a handful" of major American oil companies had diverted low-priced crude to the high-priced spot market in Rotterdam. Then, O'Rourke reported, these majors cut off deliveries to smaller companies they ordinarily supplied. The smaller oil companies were forced to buy on the spot market; they had to charge American drivers more—and this drove up prices.

§ Brian Ross, of NBC *Nightly News*, forced the Exxon Corporation to admit that, at the time of our direst need, it had diverted fifteen Exxon tankers from its Aruba refinery to Europe. Exxon wouldn't say where four of them went—presumably to the spot market.

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§ The Oregon Attorney General's office, in an independent probe, blamed the oil companies for inflicting gasoline lines on California *first* at a time when Alaskan oil was literally inundating the West Coast. It exposed the Iranian shortfall myth, reporting that there had been virtually no imports of Iranian oil to the West Coast since 1977. The Justice Department, in its recent exculpation of Big Oil, had blamed the D.O.E.'s allocation system for part of last year's havoc, but the Oregon Attorney General's office had also exposed this myth. It reported: "While gas allocations are accomplished through D.O.E., the requests to commence allocations, the statistical data on which allocations have been based and the calculation of the details of the actual allocations all originated with the oil companies themselves. . . ."

Such is the undeniable record. In light of it, it is hard to see how the Carter Administration's second whitewash of Big Oil will play any better in Peoria than it did the first time.

Chile and Chicago

Four years ago next month Orlando Letelier was assassinated when a planted bomb blew up in his car within earshot of the White House and the State Department. There was an innocent victim, as usual—Ronni Moffitt, Letelier's colleague at the Institute for Policy Studies, who was sitting beside the exiled Chilean.

There were many other innocent victims of that political murder. First, the opponents of every Latin American dictatorship, whatever their political stripes. Then we would argue that all citizens of the United States, except members of our spy and subversion outfits, join 25-year-old Moffit in that tragic category. This is so because the United States has every kind of stake in the survival of democracy everywhere and no stake at all in the dictatorships those who govern us have done so much to create and nurture.

Letelier, economist, ambassador and minister in the (elected) Salvador Allende Government, was perhaps the most effective opponent abroad of the murderous regime of Maj. Gen. Augusto Pinochet. *The Nation* comes into this story because Blair Clark, then editor, asked Letelier to write on what was happening to the economy of Chile three years after the military coup. "'Chicago Boys' in Chile" was published in our issue of August 28, 1976, two weeks before Letelier was murdered.

It was a long analysis of how the working class had been forced to its knees, how the upper middle class was gaining, how the world's bankers were back in the saddle with spurs ready. All this was happening—along with the thousands of murders—under the theoretical and administrative aegis of Milton Friedman's "Chicago Boys," those right-wing economists who have no interest in political freedom.

As John Dinges and Saul Landau put in their compelling and terrifying book, *Assassination On Embassy Row*, Letelier told some liberal U.S. Congressmen before they took off for a look at Chile in 1976 that they should look for the logic of Pinochet's terror, namely "that DINA [Chile's C.I.A., F.B.I. and S.S.] provided the Chicago Boys' free-market exactly the base it craved: a prostrate and desperate labor force." And that connection is exactly the one made in the *Nation* article that summer.

The Dinges-Landau book is scrupulously researched and documented and the most unpleasant reading for us Americans is about the intimate connection between the Central Intelligence Agency and other shadowy U.S. agencies and the official killers of Pinochet's Chile, starting with the dictator himself and his chief operative thug, Gen. Manuel Contreras. The authors of this book make no charges they cannot prove by rigorous standards. Although they failed to declare that the C.I.A. knew all about the murder team sent to kill Letelier, on the basis of their evidence many readers will conclude that American intelligence at least knew enough to stop the killers. It is hard to prove because the U.S. Government in all its branches has denied the authors access to any records under the Freedom of Information Act.

What about the Chilean economy in the four years since Letelier wrote about it for *The Nation*? The upper class has never had it so good. There is huge unemployment and misery in the working class. The economy has been rented or sold to the international corporations. Washington keeps silent about human rights. The whole Friedmanesque monstrosity, made in Chicago, is held together by the guns and torture chambers of General Pinochet. That was happening when Letelier wrote his article for us. It is, as he foresaw, much worse now.

Papal Audacity

"King, king, king, the Pope is our king!"
"John, John, John, you are our brother!"

Fortaleza, Brazil

In all of Brazil's history, there had never been anything like it—millions of chanting Brazilians at airports, stadiums and parks, in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and nine other cities visited by Pope John Paul II on his twelve-day tour of Brazil last month. So electrifying was the Pope's presence that the entire nation came to a halt, with government and business in recess and an almost total blackout of nonpapal news.

Though the world's largest Catholic nation, Brazil's 120 million people have never been noted for their religious fervor. Like soccer and samba, Catholicism forms part of the country's cultural tradition, an inheritance accepted without question or zeal. Yet millions stood for hours in the rain and tropical sun to glimpse the white-clad Pole, their "king" and "brother." In Fortaleza, in northeastern Brazil, three women were trampled to death by a huge crowd that burst through the gates of a local stadium at 4 A.M., seven hours before the Pope was due to appear there.

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"The Pope's visit has taught Brazilians certain things about themselves," observed the independent weekly news magazine *Istoe*. "It shows us the enormous willingness of the masses to turn out for someone they respect and believe in, as well as their desire for comfort and hope."

While the enthusiastic claim that Brazil "will never be the same" was undoubtedly exaggerated, John Paul did leave behind "a country more conscious of human rights and social justice," as opposition leader Tancredo Neves noted.

Contrary to the military regime's expectations, John Paul did not criticize socially activist prelates and priests or their leadership in the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (C.N.B.B.). On the contrary, the Pope repeatedly stressed his support for the C.N.B.B., singling out such "red" bishops as Recife's Archbishop Helder Camara for special praise. Frequently persecuted by the military Government for his work on behalf of the poor and oppressed, Camara had the supreme satisfaction of hearing John Paul tell a huge crowd in Recife, including local authorities, "Dom Helder is the brother of the poor and *my* brother."

Equally discomforting to those in power, John Paul consistently lectured them on the need for a more democratic and equitable society. (Two-thirds of the Brazilian people subsist on $80 a month or less.) Economic progress is meaningless if not accompanied by social justice, he told President João Baptista Figueiredo on his arrival in Brasilia. The same theme was repeated in most of his subsequent speeches. "The church of Brazil wants to be the church of the poor," he informed the inhabitants of a Rio slum, adding substance to words by giving the slum's chapel his papal ring. In São Paulo thousands of cheering workers heard the Pope affirm their right to organize and strike for better wages. In the same vein, he reminded Government authorities and peasants in Recife that private property has a "social mortgage" and that every man has a right to own the land he cultivates. He also has the right to an adequate diet, education, health care and housing; and the right—the duty—to participate in the economic and political decisions of society. "The common good," said the Pope, "is the new name for justice."

"This is not just a bishop speaking of social justice," commented Archbishop Camara, "but the representative of God Himself. The Pope has given us much courage."

John Paul made the same point at a private meeting with the Brazilian bishops in Fortaleza. The importance of the Brazilian hierarchy's role in the universal church, said the Pope, stems not just from numbers (one out of every ten bishops is a Brazilian) but from its prophetic "insertion into the life and problems of its people." The C.N.B.B. represents a major force for social change in Brazil, he told the bishops, urging them to use that power to encourage the people to seek "audacious" social, political and economic reforms.

Had any but the Pope spoken of the need for a "transformation in structures," undoubtedly there would have been charges of "Communist subversion." But such was John Paul's impact on the Brazilian masses that Government spokesmen could only lamely respond that "everyone commits social injustices." They had nothing whatsoever to say about the Pope's public invocation to God on behalf of the "hungry people" in the impoverished northeast or his demand that the Indians' tribal land rights be respected in the Amazon. (Carried away by their first meeting with the Pope in Brasilia, President Figueiredo and a host of lesser officials were hardly in a position to question the Pope's authority after they were seen on millions of television screens bowing and scraping over the papal ring.)

Within days of the Pope's departure, the Government had cause to regret its welcome when Flavio Marcilia, president of the lower chamber of the military-dominated Congress, responded to a personal request from the Pope by asking the Government to alter a controversial bill aimed at expelling or threatening critical foreign missionaries, as well as some 300,000 political refugees from neighboring military regimes. Loath to accept the dictates of either Congress or church, Figueiredo nevertheless was forced to agree to "re-examine" the law after the Pope's request was made public.

As the respected São Paulo daily *Fôlha* noted in an editorial, Figueiredo's Government totally misjudged the Pope, who, while conservative on doctrine, has emerged as a strong defender of human rights. Obviously John Paul's presence in Brazil could not alter the arbitrariness of the military Government, said São Paulo's activist Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, but it did give the people "courage and hope." "Where are you going?" John Paul asked the crowds in every city on his route, urging them to support the "noble struggle" for social justice by taking responsibility for their own development. "The construction of society is not just the job of those who control the economy, industry or agriculture," he told the nation's workers. "It is also constructed with your sweat, for your children and the future."

Although church leaders admit they cannot force the pace of Figueiredo's supposed gradual "opening" to "controlled democracy," they feel they have been given a personal mandate by the Pope to encourage the nonviolent overthrow of the country's power structures. Explained Bishop Luciano Mendes, Secretary General of the C.N.B.B., "John Paul believes that the world must find a third way between the egotism of capitalism and the suffocation of Communism, and he thinks that third way could emerge in Brazil, the largest of the Third World's Catholic nations." PENNY LERNOUX

Penny Lernoux, The Nation's Latin American correspondent, is author of the recently released Cry of the People *(Doubleday), a survey of the role the Catholic Church has played in political changes in Latin America.*

Notice to Our Readers

The Nation's summer schedule is in effect during August. The next issue will be dated August 16-23.

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ITEM. ITEM. ITEM.

■ **Much has been written about the impropriety of Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti's conversation with President Carter advising him to advise Billy to register as a foreign agent. Prof. Alan Dershowitz of the Harvard Law School has cited it as a casualty of the A.G.'s conflicting roles—on the one hand he is chief law enforcement officer, on the other he is "the President's lawyer." In fact the notion of the A.G.-as-President's-lawyer became outmoded with the advent of a full-time White House counsel (currently Lloyd Cutler, who referred Billy to the lawyer he eventually retained) and the only conflict Civiletti had was between principle and power. Did he want to administer the law evenhandedly, letting justice take its course, or was he more interested in ingratiating himself with the man who might have the power to fill the next vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court?**

What is not generally known is that at the same time Civiletti was demonstrating solicitude for the well-being of the President's brother, he was considering what Justice should do about enforcing the judgment it won against Frank Snepp, the former C.I.A. agent, for writing about the C.I.A. without its permission. The A.G.'s decision so far (notwithstanding contrary advice from John Hersey, Robert Penn Warren and others who believe it is wrong to fine a writer for telling the truth) is to squeeze every last penny out of Snepp—to force him to give the Government any and all moneys he received from his publisher. This, despite the fact that all parties concede that Snepp revealed nothing that was classified (in interesting contrast to the classified cables that the President showed his brother). This is called prosecutorial discretion.

■ There may be more to the State Department's decision to deny visas to Italian dramatist Franca Rame and her husband, playwright Dario Fo, than was apparent at the time of our editorial on the case [see "The Undesirables," June 7]. As you may recall, Rame and Fo were barred under a regulation prohibiting entry to persons belonging to groups supporting the violent overthrow of any government, and because, as a State Department official put it, "Fo's record of performance with regard to the United States and our own interests is not good." The department was not moved by the fact that Rame and Fo are opposed to terrorism and that their involvement with Italian terrorists of the Red Brigades is through a group called Soccorso Rosso (Red Aid), which provides legal assistance.

Now we have received information suggesting that the State Department ban may have been influenced by American intelligence agencies. In July 1979, the F.B.I. held an international symposium on terrorism in Langley, Virginia, at which a prominent speaker was Dr. Italo Salvatore Brunetti, a "terrorism specialist" with the Italian National Police. In the course of a speech linking nearly the entire Italian left with the Red Brigades, Brunetti delivered this aside: "We must briefly make reference to the 'fellow travelers' or supporters, who, though not being members of the Red Brigades, lend their valuable support in ideological sympathy. Among these supporters we have to mention the exponents of Soccorso Rosso (Red Aid), chiefly represented by two well-known stage actors, Dario Fo and his wife, F. Rame." It seems not unlikely that Italian police asked U.S. counterintelligence to put in a bad word for Rame and Fo when the latter announced their intention to visit the United States.

Postscript: When Monica Andres of the Center for National Security Studies made a Freedom of Information Act request for the proceedings of the terrorism symposium, the Bureau told her none existed. The Bureau, unfortunately, lied; the proceedings were published and distributed to the participants.

■ **At a time when Congressional hawks are demanding a higher percentage of the gross national product be devoted to defense spending to match the Soviet Union's putative 11 to 14 percent (this figure comes from the Defense Department's annual report for fiscal 1981), figures published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development show that U.S. nonmilitary aid to developing countries shrunk to only 0.19 percent of the G.N.P. in 1979—down from 0.27 percent in 1978. The U.N. has long advocated that the industrialized and OPEC nations meet a target of 0.7 percent of their G.N.P.s.**

Meanwhile, the world arms race is bullish. Last year, according to a report by Ruth Leger Sivard, a former U.S. Government arms control adviser, the nations of the world spent roughly $425 billion on their military establishments; expenditures on swords (and guns, tanks, bombs, missiles, etc.) are 2,500 times what is spent for ploughshares and other implements of peace. In terms of sheer tonnage, Sivard estimated, there is more explosive material on the planet than food. Total arms expenditures, in 1960 dollars, are 70 percent higher than they were twenty years ago.

■ The American hostages in Iran may be officially on the White House back burner, but watch for the heat to be turned up quickly if they become an issue in the fall election. Such was the conclusion taken away from a meeting with Administration officials by twenty representatives of Washington peace groups. After describing the current two-prong policy of diplomatic and economic pressure, a State Department representative said (in the paraphrase of one of those in attendance): "If these efforts do not bear fruit, come September/October, there will be a reassessment and more forceful measures will be adopted. He described these measures as possibly meaning a blockade and/or the mining of Iranian ports. An unstated but obvious presumption is that the likelihood of these moves could depend on President Carter's standing in the pre-election polls."

The Administration spokesman ruled out any possibility of an "apology" or other acknowledgment of past U.S. involvement in Iran and said a Congressional inquiry was highly unlikely. In sum, the Iranian situation may depend as much on Ronald Reagan's campaign oratory as on the Ayatollah Khomeini's sibylline utterances.

CAREY McWILLIAMS

For a printed transcript of the remarks delivered at the July 10th memorial service for Carey McWilliams, please send $1.00 (to cover the cost of production and mailing) to Karen Wilcox at *The Nation*.

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Empire as a Way of Life

By William Appleman Williams

I.

From the beginning, our imperial way of life seduced us into assuming that we could go on forever projecting the present into the future: that we could start over again and again and again. F. Scott Fitzgerald understood that when he had Jay Gatsby speak these lines: "Can't repeat the past," he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can."

That traditional assumption was elevated into a blind faith by the tremendous absolute and relative power that we Americans enjoyed after 1945. We came to think of ourselves as being beyond history—*beyond being human.* Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson expressed the feeling perfectly in his attitude that "only the United States could get hold of History and make it conform." It was not simply our military and economic power over other societies; it also, and perhaps more importantly, involved the way that we allowed our technological accomplishments to fragment the essential continuity—the process—of life. The most obvious example is television, which defines experience as disconnected episodes without significant relationships or consequences. A terrifying distortion of reality certified by Walter Cronkite's daily Hail Mary: "And that's the way it is."

William Appleman Williams teaches in the department of history at Oregon State University. He is president of the Organization of American Historians and is the author of the forthcoming Empire as a Way of Life, *from which this article is adapted.*

But in truth it is extremely difficult to imagine anything further from the way it is.

We can see that dramatically illustrated by our response to events in Iran, the West Bank, Afghanistan and in America itself. Our intellectual, political and psychological confusion is the result of our *a*historical faith that we are not now and never have been an empire. Yet there is no way to understand the nature of our predicament except by confronting our history as an empire. That is the only way to comprehend the Iranian demand that we acknowledge our long-term interference in their affairs, the widespread anger about our acquiescence in the progression of Israel's settlements on the West Bank, the Russian charge that we apply one standard to them and another to ourselves and the deep resentment of us among the peoples of the poor countries. The only way we can come to terms with those matters is to look our imperial history in the eye without blinking, flinching or walking away into the wonderland of Woodrow Wilson's saving the world for democracy.

Empire Defined

Let us start with a workable definition of empire: the use and abuse, and the ignoring, of other people for one's own welfare and convenience. Now in truth, America was born and bred of empire. That does not mean that we are unique; indeed, just the opposite. We are part and parcel of the imperial outreach of Western Europe that came to dominate the world. But therein lies the irreducible cause of our present predicament. We have from the beginning defined and viewed ourselves as unique. The differences between ourselves and other nations are not incidental but they are irrelevant to the fundamental issue. We are different only because we acquired the empire at a very low cost, because the rewards have been enormous and because until now we have masked our imperial truth with the rhetoric of freedom.

But we do have a bench mark. Once upon a time, about a century before America was rediscovered by Christopher Columbus, at least the fifth time someone had done it, the Chinese sent seven massive fleets westward to Africa and perhaps on into the Atlantic Ocean. The ships measured between 400 and 500 feet, and there were enough of them to carry upward of 37,000 people. Their so-called junks were impressive intercontinental missiles. The Chinese came, they traded, they observed. They made no effort to create an empire or even an imperial sphere of influence. Upon returning home, their reports engendered a major debate. The decision was made to burn and otherwise destroy the great fleets and concentrate on developing Chinese society and culture.

The point is not to present the Chinese as immaculately disinterested, or whiter than white. It is simply to note that we now know that the capacity for empire does not lead irresistibly or inevitably to the reality of empire. The Chinese, driven south by the Mongols and other invaders, could easily have rationalized empire as necessity. They chose instead to defeat the invaders and develop their own culture in its almost infinite variations on the two themes of Confucianism and Taoism.

Not so with Western Europeans, including our English forefathers. They were not content with exploration and nonviolent intercourse with other cultures. From the beginning, the Western Europeans went for global empire. We Americans were conceived and born and bred of that imperial conception and way of life. We can explain that, even defend it, but we cannot deny it.

That phrase, that idea—*way of life*—puzzles some people and upsets other people. A way of life is the pattern of assumptions and perceptions, and values, methods and objectives, that characterize and guide the actions of a culture. Here are three amplifications of that definition:

"We stabilize around a set of concepts . . . and hold them dear. At each

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moment of each day we make the same mistakes."

"Those unconsciously accepted presuppositions which, in any age, so largely determine what men think about the nature of the universe and what can and cannot happen to it."

"*Ideas that we do not know we have, have us.* And they shape our experiences from behind, unbeknown."

The Price of Freedom

Within that framework, let us examine certain ideas that guided the development of our imperial way of life. Christianity was once a vital part of Western European expansionism. It provoked and justified all kinds of imperial activity: accumulating capital by conquest, striking terror into the hearts and minds of the heathens who wanted to keep their wealth for themselves and forcibly changing other peoples' ways of life the better to convert them to the true religion. I am more concerned here, however, with three ideas developed by secular British leaders that came to define so much of our own imperial outlook.

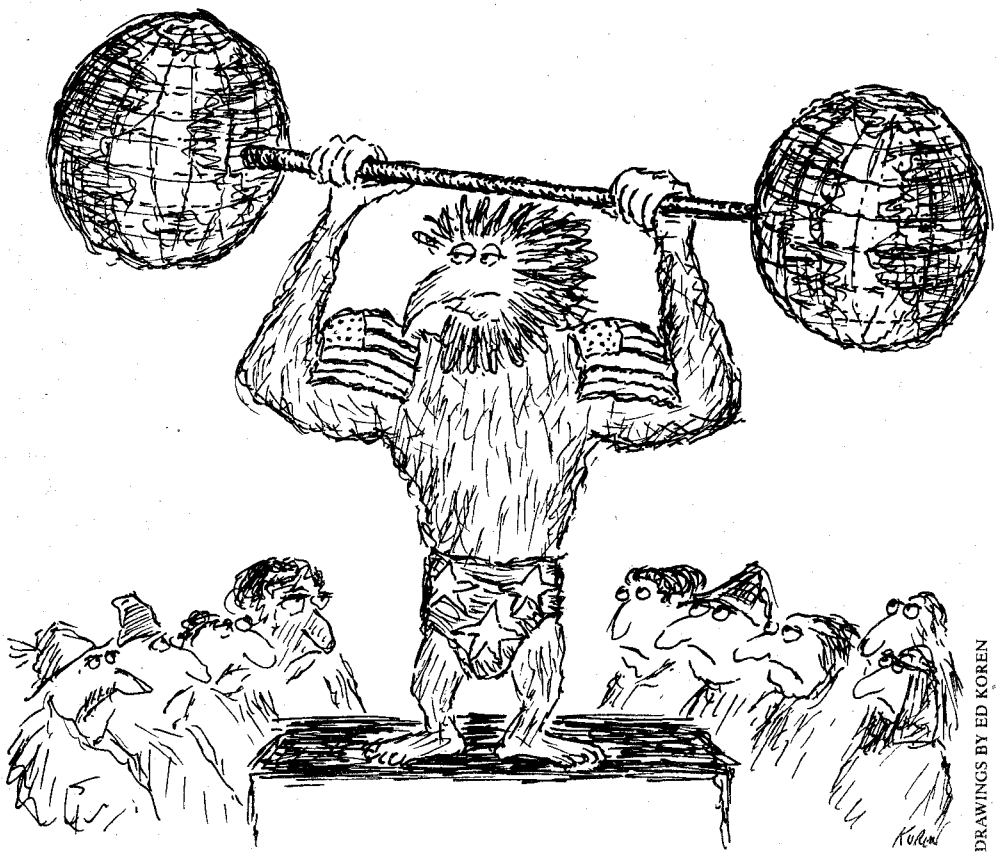
John Locke provided a fine summary of two of them in one classic paragraph. Wealth, he explained, was not defined by having what one needed but by having more than one's neighbor; hence it was permissible, even desirable, to take riches away from one's neighbor. That neatly doubled the relative advantage. The third proposition was most strikingly formulated by Sir Francis Bacon. The worst kind of domestic disorder was caused by "the rebellions of the belly." Expansion was the only sure way to prevent that kind of threat to the social order. It not only generated economic growth but it dispersed potential troublemakers and thus decreased the density of discontent.

The American leaders who made the Revolution and the Constitution were familiar with all those imperial ideas. And in Virginia, for example, men of property had realized the value of imperial expansion for controlling the white poor long before Patrick Henry began talking about liberty or death. Indeed, the dialogue between other Virginians provides an excellent insight into the development of an imperial way of life.

James Madison never discounted the importance of economic expansion, commercial or territorial; but he stressed the need for surplus social space to avoid political turmoil when he advanced his famous argument about extending the sphere in defense of the Constitution. In denying the conventional wisdom that a republican government could survive only in a small state, Madison was implicitly arguing that empire is the price of freedom.

It is sometimes maintained, of course, that Madison was never explicitly imperial. Not only do his actions deny that but so do all the contemporary arguments against his theory. Robert Yates, along with many other critics of the Constitution, saw immediately that it would create an empire. A Northerner noted in sadness that "we wish to make a noise in the world," and pleaded with his readers to face up to the truth that "extensive empire is a misfortune." George Clinton of New York reasserted the validity of the classic argument about size and democracy in a stinging analysis of Madison's imperial logic. But, as with others, he ruefully concluded that the appeal of empire would carry the day.

For his part, John Taylor of Caroline County, Virginia, was devastating. He began by mocking Madison's euphemism for imperial expansion—"extending the sphere." Of course, agreed Taylor, republicanism could in theory be extended over "spacious spheres." But only if one did not count other cultures as involving real people, only if the added spheres were truly equal republics, and only if the central government was predicated upon an effort to



DRAWINGS BY ED KOREN

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encourage man's good propensities rather than control his evil tendencies.

He then warned that Madison's Constitution satisfied none of those requirements. It created an "*iron government*" guaranteed to favor "evil moral qualities" and to generate war upon war. And, since the decision for war was in the end "unsubjected to publick opinion," opposition to war was in effect defined as "an opposition to the nation itself." That rendered "useless or impracticable the freedoms of speech and of the press."

Whatever the sometimes almost incomprehensible convolutions of his prose or the embittered railings of his frustrations, Taylor understood that America had embraced an imperial way of life. He knew, Thomas Paine to the contrary notwithstanding, that the United States had not begun the world over again. No wonder he ultimately lost his respect for Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson was far too intelligent not to understand Taylor. Indeed, too smart not to recognize the meaning of the Chinese decision that I have described. He alluded to that in one letter and, sensing the implications, quickly dropped the subject. In that respect, and it is an important one, Jefferson was much more like us ordinary folk than either Madison or Taylor.

Jefferson wanted to have it every way imaginable. He wanted to be the best hope on earth. He wanted to civilize the heathen. He wanted Canada and Florida and the rest of the continent. And he wanted to institutionalize the decentralized face-to-face community as opposed to the impersonal society. That brought Jefferson eyeball to eyeball with Madison and Taylor. Settle for what one needed or go for empire.

He knew the meaning of anguish about it all, but he went for empire. Half honestly and half dishonestly. The honest part was saying that empire is necessary for freedom and social order as defined by Locke and Bacon. The dishonest part was asserting that empire did not subvert freedom. So between them, Jefferson and Madison used their sixteen years as President to institutionalize empire as a way of life. Taylor went home and gave it all up for lost.

II.

Make no mistake about it: the imperial way of life produced the promised rewards. It generated great economic wealth and effectively limited the scope and intensity of social discontent. By the time that James Monroe had left the White House, the United States had asserted its predominance throughout the Western Hemisphere and was well entrenched in Hawaii.

But we must also report the costs. I do not for a moment dismiss the people killed and the property stolen, but I would suggest that the greatest price was paid in the coin of our sensitivity about what we were doing and how that was understood by other peoples. We were already far down the road of *believing* that we were not an empire, and viscerally resenting any suggestion that we were an empire. And already far down the road, as Prof. Arthur K. Weinberg pointed out many years ago, of assuming that our right to security transcended the traditional right to defend what we had and had become the right to perfect security in any imaginable future contingency. We began to define security as the natural right to empire.

More Freedom: More Empire

There was another cost. Americans became so habituated to empire as the price of freedom that they demanded ever more freedom and ever more empire. Andrew Jackson was at once a prime mover and the symbol of that new enthusiasm for the imperial way of life. More freedom at home and more expansion elsewhere. People like the Cherokees who could create and sustain a representative government within fixed spatial limits were clearly backward—and so a threat to the American Way. Move them out and force them to adapt to surplus space. People like the inhabitants of the northern half of Mexico, who used surplus space to relax and live a balanced and ecologically responsible life, were backward for another reason. They did not exploit the surplus space. So move them out or aside. And all the while other Americans, the merchants, the shippers, the sealers, the whalers and the Navy, were busy defining the sea itself as another frontier to be penetrated, controlled and exploited.

The empire was free and hence it was not an empire. A small but perceptive number of Americans—we can symbolize them in John Quincy Adams and John C. Calhoun—knew better and were more honest. Adams knew that freeing the Cherokees from their limits in Georgia, or freeing the northern half of Mexico, made a mockery of freedom. And he, along with Calhoun, knew that chattel slavery was the bedrock definition of empire. I suggest to you that both of them were willing to face those truths.

They were ready to accept the consequences of their knowledge of history. Calhoun was willing to risk the danger inherent in defining freedom in terms of slavery. Adams was willing to challenge Madison's theory and risk the ability of Americans to sustain freedom and republican government in a limited space.

On balance, and granted that the weighing of these matters is a dicey business, I think Adams had the best of it. He concluded, after much thought, that if you called Calhoun's bluff—meaning let the slave states go—the free states would win. Adams in effect said to Calhoun: "You cannot make it on slavery. You need us, and you will have to free them. When you understand that we will be here to work it out together." Calhoun accepted the challenge: both men introduced amendments to the Constitution to legitimize secession.

Even if they had lived, they had no chance. Long before they died, a lawyer

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in Illinois had made it clear that he was going to resolve the dilemma inherent in empire as the price of freedom. Abraham Lincoln, the crossroads lawyer who moved on to bank retainers from corporations in Chicago, was more than a bit like Jefferson. He wanted it every which way. Honor his forefathers and make his fame by transcending—replacing—the Founding Fathers. Tough-minded about restricting the expansion of slavery to destroy slavery and naïve enough to think that he could bluff the sons of Taylor and Calhoun.

Many people make much of Lincoln's sniping at the Mexican War. They revel in his ploy to trap President James Polk in a debate about where and when and under what circumstances American blood was spilled. But they never tell us simply and directly that Lincoln accepted the imperial fruits of that war and concerned himself with the division of the spoils. If we go by the evidence, then we must conclude that Lincoln opposed the war of conquest against Mexico only as a tactical maneuver to further his grandiose ambition.

In and of itself, ambition is not a damning characteristic. For the historian, that is to say, it is rather like sex. What matters is the intensity and focus of the ambition, and the means accepted as legitimate to realize the objective. Lincoln left many tracks in the dust, the mud and the snow. A fair number of those foxy marks were designed to confuse or mislead various people without exposing himself to the charge of being formally dishonest. Lincoln took great care to say what he meant, even if he phrased it in ways that could be misunderstood. But he was clear enough during three crucial moments of his career.

First as a young man entering politics; second during his long campaign for the Presidency, and third while he was so largely silent between his election and his inauguration. When he launched his public life in those lectures before the Young Men's Christian Association in the late 1830s, he was youthfully candid. He said explicitly that he was out to transcend the Founding Fathers and in the process give Truth to the world. Then, during the 1850s, he announced and regularly repeated his strategy: deny the South the right to expand. That would at once destroy slavery and give the North control of the empire.

Finally, in those fateful winter months of 1860-61, he several times offered two cryptic comments. Asked constantly what he intended to do, he replied that anyone who read him carefully would know the answer. And, in reply to suggestions that he should negotiate, he said that there would be a "tug"—a short, sharp confrontation—and then it would be over and done.

Lincoln's Faustian Bargain

Lincoln was not transcending the Founding Fathers. Unlike John Quincy Adams, for example, he did not think that freedom could survive in three-quarters, or even half, of a continent. He was saying only that it was necessary to push the proposition that empire was the price of freedom to its ultimate conclusion. "It will become all one thing or another."

Yet Lincoln was engaged in the long process of making a Faustian bargain with the Devil. A few historians and other commentators have seen that theme at the center of a more limited stage, say the life of Daniel Webster, but none except Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville have ever interpreted our national life in that framework. So let us salute Lincoln for the right reasons. He knowingly sat down to cut the deck with the Devil. He bet our history, indeed our truth, on winning quickly and easily. There will be a "tug" and then it will be over.

But the Confederacy did truly believe in the right to go to hell in its own way. And so Lincoln had to pay the price. Nobody has told that part of the story as simply and dispassionately, and yet as ruthlessly, as Russell F. Weigley in his study *The American Way of War.* Lincoln very quickly realized that the Devil would collect his due. The price of freedom as defined by Americans was indeed empire. Failing to win quickly, Lincoln had no choice but to annihilate the enemy. And the doctrine of unconditional surrender inevitably led on to occupation and colonial rule.

For at least two generations thereafter, the price of freedom for the North and the West was paid by the South —black as well as white. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was not wrong when he cried out in 1936 that the South—one-third of the nation—was significantly poorer than the rest of the country. There is a great irony in all the contem-

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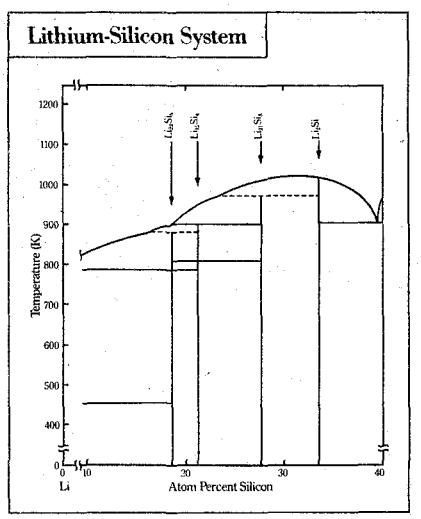
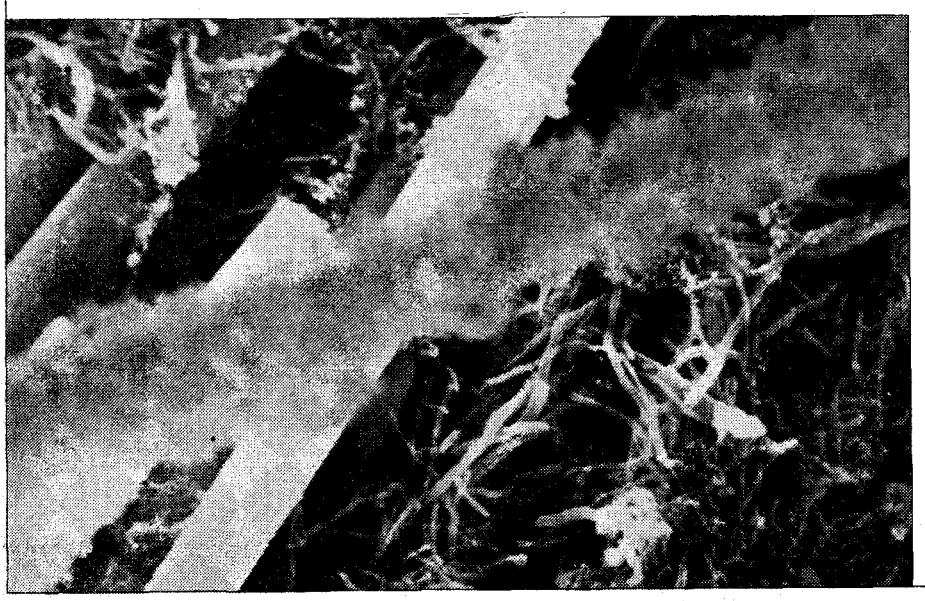
The Lithium Paradigm

The practicality of a mass-produced electric car depends upon the development of a long-life, low-cost, rechargeable battery. Recent discoveries at the General Motors Research Laboratories have encouraged scientists seeking to harness the abundant but elusive energy available in lithium—a highly desirable battery component.



Partial phase diagram of the lithium-silicon system. Lithium activity changes by two orders of magnitude in the concentration range shown.

Color-enhanced scanning electron micrograph showing the results of lithium attack on boron nitride.



HIGH ELECTROPOSITIVITY and low equivalent weight make lithium an ideal battery reactant, capable of supplying the specific energy needed to operate an electric vehicle. The source of the abundant energy available in lithium, however, is exactly what makes it almost impossible to manage. The challenge is to prepare alloys and find materials stable enough to contain the aggressiveness of lithium without greatly suppressing its activity.

New knowledge of the thermodynamic properties of lithium-containing materials has been revealed by fundamental studies conducted at the General Motors Research Laboratories. Investigations, carried out by Dr. Ram Sharma and his colleagues, aim at developing a basic comprehensive understanding of selected "exotic" systems. Their work is directly related to the search for an advanced molten salt battery cell.

Specific energies greater than 180 W·h/kg, about five times that of the lead-acid battery, have been demonstrated by electrochemical cells utilizing LiCl-KCl electrolyte and electrodes of metal sulfide and lithium alloy. But operating temperatures of 723 K and the aggressive nature of the chemical reactants pose serious new challenges to cell construction materials. Of particular concern is the lithium attack upon separators and seal components. Most inorganic insulators, including the refractory oxides and nitrides, are destroyed or rendered conductive by this attack. Boron nitride, one of the more resistant materials, has been the subject of Dr. Sharma's recent, successful efforts to establish conditions under which attack may be avoided.

Dr. Sharma began by exploring the thermodynamics of the lithium-silicon system. Silicon reduces the activity of lithium without substantially increasing its weight, and produces a manageable solid at 723 K.

Constant-current potentiometry experiments were carried out in an inert atmosphere. The electrochemical cell consisted of a Li-Si alloy positive electrode, a eutectic mixture of LiCl-KCl electrolyte, and two Li-Al alloy electrodes—one negative and one reference electrode.

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A series of anodic and cathodic cycles at very low current densities indicated three well-defined voltage plateaus below 80 atom percent lithium composition. This behavior was confirmed by experiments in which pure silicon was used in place of Li-Si alloy as the starting material.

The results were used to modify the Li-Si phase diagram, which indicated only two such plateaus. The revised phase diagram shows four compounds: Li_2Si, $Li_{21}Si_8$, $Li_{15}Si_4$ and $Li_{22}Si_5$. The exact composition of $Li_{21}Si_8$ had not previously been known.

Dr. Sharma confirmed the existence of the new compound by x-ray diffraction analysis. He determined its melting point to be 976 ± 8 K by differential thermal analysis. He produced a scanning electron micrograph that clearly indicates a single phase for the compound. He was also able to determine the maximum nonstoichiometric ranges of the lithium-silicon compounds from charge passed during the transitions between voltage plateaus.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE lithium activity present in the system's various compounds allowed Dr. Sharma to evaluate the stability of boron nitride with Li-Si alloys of differing composition.

A controlled potential was imposed on a boron nitride cloth sample in an electrochemical cell. By monitoring the current in the cell at different potentials, Dr. Sharma established the point at which lithium activity produces reaction.

Boron nitride was found to react with $Li_{15}Si_4$ only when in the presence of $Li_{22}Si_5$. The new compound, $Li_{21}Si_8$, did not exhibit sufficient lithium activity to attack boron nitride.

Reaction occurred according to the following equation:

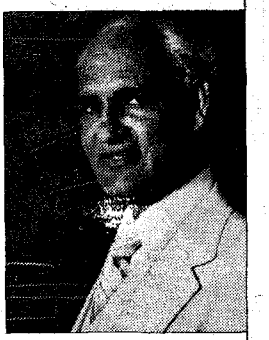
$$BN + (3+x)\,Li = Li_xB + Li_3N$$

The lithium nitride that formed during reaction dissolved in the molten salt electrolyte, but the lithium boride remained on the surface and became electronically conductive, causing high self-discharge in the cell.

"The establishment of the region of stability of boron nitride makes it possible to recommend appropriate charging limits," according to Dr. Sharma.

"Restricting the amount of charge in keeping with the recommended limits will control lithium activity, preventing the formation of highly-conductive compounds and adding durability to an electrochemical system which already displays high specific energy. Ultimately, that brings the prospect of high-performance electric vehicles closer to reality."

THE MAN BEHIND THE WORK



Dr. Ram Sharma is a Senior Research Scientist in the Department of Electrochemistry at the General Motors Research Laboratories.

Dr. Sharma was educated in India and England. He graduated from Banaras Hindu University with an M. Sc. in physical chemistry. He received a Ph. D. in physical chemistry and chemical metallurgy from London University's Imperial College of Science and Technology.

Before joining General Motors in 1970, Dr. Sharma conducted research at the Argonne National Laboratory, the Institute of Direct Energy Conversion at the University of Pennsylvania, the Nuffield Research Group in England and the National Metallurgical Laboratory in India.

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porary talk and concern about the vast global discrepancy between the rich North and the poor South. One might think that Americans would have a particularly keen understanding of that truth. But empire as a way of life has never been noted for developing empathy with its victims.

There is also a fine irony in the way that the great war for American freedom led on to ever more empire. And it is fitting that Lincoln provides us with an insight into the dynamics of that process. He knew, by December 1862, that the gamble on a quick victory had been lost. He had to have money and men in large quantities. He therefore appealed to the imperial tradition. Speaking to the agricultural majority, he wasted no euphemisms. He told them they had to stay the course because it was not enough to have access to the world via New York and San Francisco. It was also necessary to control New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico.

No one will ever know how many volunteers that speech produced, but that is not the issue at hand. The document does tell us how Lincoln's mind was working at a time of serious if not extreme difficulty, and it therefore suggests—given Lincoln's astute sense of politics—that we ought to keep our historical eye on those farmers he was addressing in such candidly imperial language.

The significance of Lincoln's appeal to Western farmers to fight on for imperial objectives upsets historians of every political persuasion. Radicals resist the notion that ordinary folk support imperialism. Conservatives cannot easily come to terms with the reality that empire is related to liberty as they define it. And liberals long to resolve the dilemma by defining empire as global freedom and welfare.

Imperial Farmers

Despite that tide of wisdom, I suggest that American farmers of the nineteenth century provide us with a revealing illustration of the dynamic evolution of our imperial way of life. They began by defining empire as ever more free or cheap land and concluded by demanding strong government action to help them penetrate and hold foreign markets. All in the name of freedom and security. That process is worth examining closely because it reveals a great deal about our American outlook as it developed in the twentieth century. As we do so, let us keep in mind the observations of three quite different people who lived in and studied the West.

The first is from Senator Albert Beveridge, a progressive politician from the Ohio River Valley: "Never forget that we are the only people on earth whose farmers buy the adjoining farm before they need it. We are of the blood which furnishes the world with its Daniel Boones, its Francis Drakes, its Cecil Rhodes."

The second is from Wright Morris, a writer who has revealed much of the soul of the Missouri Valley in his novels: "The prevailing tendency of the American mind [is] to take to the woods."

The third is from Carl Lotus Becker, one of America's most insightful (if currently neglected) historians. People who open and settle the frontiers, he noted, "must be always transforming the world into their ideal of it." The mind of such a people "is too sure of itself to be at home with ideas of uncertain pressure. Knowing that it is right, it wishes only to go ahead. Satisfied with certain conventional premises, it hastens on to the obvious conclusion."

Long before the end of the Civil War, the conventional premises involved the need for surplus space and resources to sustain economic well-being and political democracy. There were people who went west to commune with Nature à la Thoreau, and others who did so to explore the possibility of an agrarian-based communitarianism or socialism. And it can be argued that in the beginning a sizable number of the people who went west—perhaps for a moment a majority—sought nothing more than a modestly better life as members of small, local communities.

But once they moved beyond the subsistence level of farming, they found themselves in a highly competitive, surplus-producing marketplace economy that increasingly operated as part of a world system. Of necessity if not by choice, they became business people (business *families*) ever more concerned with markets for their surpluses, and with more land and better machines. And, by the end of the 1870s, they were keenly aware that foreign countries, along with other groups in the domestic economy, exercised considerable influence in and over those markets.

Clearly enough, the farmers wanted to regulate the banks, railroads and other large corporations and to reform the domestic political system; but they wanted to do that *while at the same time* saving the Cubans and generally deploying American power to help the world break free of autocratic European power and be tutored in The American Way. There is no inherent or logical connection between being a domestic reformer and an anti-imperialist. Militant populists like Tom Watson of Georgia and Sockless Jerry Simpson of Kansas established that point long before Theodore Roosevelt or Woodrow Wilson.

Or listen to Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota: "Our form of government is adapted to civilized men everywhere. . . . Great as we are, we are yet in the day of small things. . . . [Our] destiny is to grasp the commerce of all the seas and sway the sceptre of the world." That sounds more than a bit like Dean Acheson asserting some fifty years later that only the United States had the power to grab hold of History and make it conform. Or hear Henry Demarest Lloyd, another late-nineteenth-century reformer: "If nobody can lick us, we need not be afraid to play the just and generous big brother among the nations." That was the only way "to fulfill our mission to defend and *extend* liberty."

Nobody knows, or ever will know, what form the vigorous expansionism of the agricultural majority would have taken if William Jennings Bryan (or another agrarian leader) had won one or more of the elections of 1892, 1896 and 1900. But we do know what most of them did in response to the actions of their opponents, and that does not suggest that they would have mounted a frontal assault on the imperial way of life. They supported the annexation of Hawaii, demanded a tough line against Great Britain during the Venezuelan boundary crisis, agitated militantly for intervention in Cuba and cheered Adm. George Dewey's victory in the Philippines. As for Bryan, he shifted back and forth between reform at home and educating the Mexicans and other Latin Americans without dropping a note or mixing a metaphor.

Battleships and Bibles

The agricultural spokesmen were defeated by urban commercial, financial and industrial leaders who accepted the importance of overseas markets and resources. Indeed, Lincoln's successors

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in the Republican Party increasingly stressed the martyred President's line of argument in building their constituency in the West. Ulysses S. Grant, James G. Blaine, Benjamin Harrison and William McKinley all responded to the rising demand for markets and sought to reform various heathens while challenging Europe's global power.

But expansion was also advocated by many noneconomic groups. One of the more charming bits of our folklore holds, for example, that the Navy was beached and broken from 1865 until it was refloated during the 1890s on the imperial rhetoric of Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan. The truth is rather different. On the one hand, the windblown wooden ships remained quite effective. Even without counting the Atlantic and European squadrons, the fleets on other stations made 5,980 port calls between 1869 and 1897. Those visits were concentrated in the areas noted for their potential as markets and sources of raw materials. Their sailing orders emphasized the importance of preventing European powers from obtaining special advantages and of supporting local governments favorable to American interests.

On the other hand, leaders like Benjamin F. Tracy quietly began, early in the 1880s, to build a new battle fleet. As often happens, the delayed start of that program enabled the United States to build ships that were significantly better than the first generation of European vessels. None of that detracts from Mahan's importance, but it places him in proper perspective. As a result, it was the Navy that defined the imperial strategy for a war against Spain to free Cuba—namely, take Manila as well as Santiago and Havana.

Mahan was only one of many American intellectual leaders, moreover, who were developing systematic theories and arguments for imperial expansion. There is a significant amount of vigorous Christianity in Mahan's writing, for example, and the late-nineteenth-century missionary movement did a good deal to excite people about spreading the American gospel (and its attendant commercial rights) in the Middle East and China. And when combined with the doctrine of Social Darwinism by such spellbinders as John Fiske and Josiah Strong, it created imperial best sellers.

The people who made policy were probably more directly influenced by

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less flamboyant analyses and syntheses. Some of those were offered by thoughtful and informed business leaders like Charles Conant and J. P. Morgan. They understood how the once relatively open marketplace had come to be dominated by a few large operators in each major part of the economy (including many aspects of agriculture) and how the increase in productivity had generated an insatiable demand for markets and raw materials. They viewed the marketplace as an integrated system that required close management at home and expansion overseas. Others, typified by Brooks Adams and Frederick Jackson Turner, offered grand historical interpretations that directly or indirectly indicated that expansion was the key to sustaining welfare and democracy.

Such imperial ideas—and related actions—were persistently criticized by a range from socialists on the left to traditional laissez-faire conservatives on the right. They never mustered enough support to change the imperial policy between 1890 and 1920, but they did occasionally limit its thrust—as in Cuba, the Philippines and Mexico. Even so, in several crucial episodes, most strikingly Panama and World War I, many of the critics became imperial patriots eager to extend American power and reform the world.

Bully Policeman

During those three decades, therefore, the United States evolved and acted upon a coherent and dynamic imperial outlook. The image of themselves that Americans developed in those years is best characterized as one of the United States as a benevolent, progressive policeman. That view was classically expressed by Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson: the former in his famous corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and the latter in his cry to make the world safe for democracy.

Modern criminology defines three primary idioms of police activity: the watchman, the legalistic and the service. The first concentrates on keeping the peace, preferably by intimidation but if necessary by recourse to violence. The second functions on the assumption that there is a single standard of conduct. The third honors the values and priorities of its particular community. Between 1890 and 1920, Americans synthesized all three on a global scale: keeping the peace as defined by one community's standard of conduct.

But Americans also knew what they wanted to do with that peace. Elihu Root, who served as Secretary of State as well as Secretary of War, explained that with his typical clarity and candor. The issue was "the door, being open, shall lead to something." "Intercourse with [a country like Algeria] demands the existence of internal conditions favorable thereto. . . . Equality of opportunities for trade with all natives; . . . improvement of the condition of the people that will enable them to profit by the opportunities of foreign traffic. . . . The power to repress subversive disorder and preserve the public peace. . . . [And] people shall be made in a measure fit and able to profit by the advantages" of being integrated into the imperial system.

Wilson's grandiose effort to institutionalize America as the benevolent progressive policeman of the world provoked two major debates. The most famous one concerned whether or not it was *possible*—let alone *wise*—to undertake that project. Wilson was defeated by a fascinating coalition. One group was composed of imperial-minded leaders who concluded that it was pragmatically impossible; the others were led by anti-imperialists who effectively portrayed the proposal as one that would destroy the image of America as benevolent and progressive.

The second discussion grew out of that fight over the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations and became a long dialogue from 1920 to 1940 between the two elements in the coalition that defeated Wilson. To a surprising degree, moreover, it was conducted in the candid language of the nature and the limits of empire. The majority of historians who matured during that debate committed a grievous disservice to themselves, and the rest of us, by using the clichés of *isolationism* and *internationalism* to define and analyze that highly significant dialogue.

The protagonists fully understood that those terms grossly distorted both the issues and their own high seriousness. The substance concerned the fundamental matters of political economy. That is:

(*1*) Who makes policy on the basis of what perceptions and interests;

(*2*) To what extent are welfare and democracy dependent upon empire;

(*3*) Granted that it is necessary, what is the optimum size of the empire; and what are the effective and proper means of structuring, controlling and defending the empire so that it will in practice produce welfare and democracy with the lowest possible negative consequences;

(*4*) What is the minimum effective size of the empire, and

(*5*) What happens if we simply say no to empire as a way of life?

Questions Between the Wars

The dialogue had many focuses: from the power of concentrated economic wealth within America, to the revolutions in Russia and China, the oil of Arabia, and Mexico and the Caribbean. I will get to China and Russia in due time, but for the moment let us concentrate on oil because that black, messy stuff wonderfully clarifies the issues. And also the perceptions and the ambivalences of all the participants in the debate.

Our first oil scare occurred between 1919 and 1924 at a time when the United States was still pumping almost more of the guck than the rest of the world combined. The symbol of that panic is the Teapot Dome Scandal, a crisis defined by smaller oil companies like Sinclair attempting to use piddling amounts of cash as a Rapid Deployment Force to defeat giants like Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company. It reminds me of the best of punk rock: bring search-and-destroy operations back home from Vietnam and use them against the real enemy.

All that said, that early oil crisis gives us important insights into how responsible American leaders were thinking about empire as a way of life. *At a distance, as in Arabia, it was empire as usual.* They used economic power (Europe's need for capital) to force England and France to give us access to the black stuff that was the blood of their Mediterranean empires. Standard Oil became the chosen instrument of imperial expansion.

But when the empire began to bubble closer to home, next door in Mexico (or Cuba and elsewhere around the Caribbean), responsible people began to understand that nineteenth-century empire was in trouble. Gunboats, even gunboats loaded with Marines, do not navigate so well amid seas of people who have decided that the oil is their oil. The debate became very serious. Indeed. We came as close as we ever have, even including John Taylor of Virginia

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and John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, to facing the issues inherent in empire as a way of life. Standard Oil and other imperial spokesmen wanted to sustain the empire everywhere under any and all conditions. But thoughtful and moral conservatives like Herbert Clark Hoover and Dwight Morrow argued for coming to terms with reality and negotiating *equal* relationships. And anti-imperialists like Charles Austin Beard began to face and explore the gut issue, the question asked by Eugene Debs: How do we remain democratic without an empire?

Leaders like Hoover, Morrow and Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes were not isolationists. They did not propose to refrain from using American power and influence. But they did entertain grave doubts about the imperial policies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. They wanted to reduce armaments and avoid military interventions, and they manifested a far more relaxed attitude toward the various movements for social change throughout the world. They also enjoyed a sense of history that gave them a perspective on the limits of empire and the counterproductive consequences of trying to control everything that happened around the globe.

Morrow expressed that very simply in the course of his efforts to work out an accommodation with the leaders of the Mexican revolution. "It sometimes amuses me," he commented, "when people say, 'settle the Mexican question.' You and I know that neither the Mexican nor the Cuban question will be 'settled' in the lifetime of anyone now living." In the same vein, Hoover understood that "a large part of the world had come to believe that they were in the presence of the birth of a new imperial power intent upon dominating the destinies and freedom of other people." And he was at great pains, in his actions as well as his words, to make it clear that he "absolutely disapproved" of the Big Brother conception of American foreign policy.

Given the approach that those leaders were attempting to put into operation, and the dynamics of their dialogue with more explicitly anti-imperial spokesmen, it is clear that the United States was beginning to come to terms with empire as a way of life. But that process was aborted when, for the fourth time in a century, the capitalist political economy collapsed in a massive depression. The Great Depression of the 1930s was a vast social trauma of great intensity, and the culture proved incapable of dealing with the crisis by evolving an alternative way of life.

Saving America First

The debate about foreign policy continued, but the talk rather quickly focused on its role in saving the system and on the question of going to war against Germany and Japan. The overriding concern with saving the system meant that serious talk about alternatives was lost in the scramble to find and apply traditional remedies. From the outset, for example, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his associates viewed expanded foreign trade and rearmament as central features of the New Deal.

Neither those nor other programs proved effective. One does not have to cite radical critics. Harry Hopkins and Adolph A. Berle candidly admitted at the end of the 1930s that the New Deal had failed to restore the health of the political economy. There were still ten to twelve million unemployed, and the recession of 1937 was the most devastating one in the history of the country.

And so to war. But not a war to defend a functioning, equitable society—not even a new vision of such a society. And so into the dissembling and the lying; and into the stretching of the letter as well as the spirit of the Constitution—and the related weakening of the principles and practices of representative government. I say those things with great anguish because I thought then and I think now that we should have stood with England against Hitler.

But we should have done it at the end of an open, honest debate. And if the decision had been to wait and see, or to go to war only with a clear commitment to basic structural reforms, or to fight Germany but not Japan (or vice versa)—then so be it. What nags my soul in the sunshine on the Oregon beach is not that I was shot at and hit but that my leaders lied to me and never faced the real issue inherent in the imperial way of life.

Instead, as historians John Morton Blum and Stephen E. Ambrose have made apparent, Roosevelt and his associates crab-walked into two wars. They then determined to win them as fast and as thoroughly and as cheaply as possible—all with the least possible disruption of domestic society. We are back with Lincoln and the annihilation of the Confederacy, hoping that the casualties won't be too high. There were three major consequences of that decision and approach.

(*1*) We would help the Russians do

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most of the dying. That involved grave dissembling in our negotiations with them about a second front.

(2) We would rely on machines, especially airplanes, rather than men. We were doing that long before Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Someone with a fancy for black humor might conclude that since we failed to invent a precision bomb-sight, or develop the long-range fighters necessary for its use, we settled for the atom bomb. But the real point is that we abandoned precision bombing very early in the game. One of the early firestorm raids killed 42,000 in Hamburg. Then Dresden, where 2,372 bombers managed to kill approximately fifty people apiece. And then Tokyo, where on one night some 83,000 people sizzled, suffocated and fried.

(3) The domestic American political economy was sustained by war rather than by reform. Perhaps the most revealing episode of that part of the story occurred in January 1941, a year before Pearl Harbor but after it was apparent that armaments had become the prescription for recovery. The most militant and impressive black leader of that day, A. Philip Randolph of the Pullman Sleeping Car Porters Union, began to organize a massive march on Washington to force the New Deal to honor its rhetoric and promises to the poor and the blacks and other minorities.

Roosevelt wanted nothing of that nature to confuse the issues and so, after six months of shilly-shallying, he finessed the crisis by issuing an executive order ostensibly ending discrimination in war-related industries, the military and the civilian Federal bureaucracy. There were no penalties for failure to comply. But it was enough to abort the demonstration.

Thus were American leaders confirmed in their faith in their imperial outlook. And they thereby misled themselves. They concluded that other radicals and militants would compromise on American terms. But the Russians were not American blacks. Nor were the Chinese, or various others. Just as the American blacks, those peoples were deeply patriotic. But not to the American imperial way of life.

Given all that, let us do a bit of routine cost accounting on the consequences of winning a war as quickly, thoroughly and cheaply as possible and with the least possible disruption of American society. The first line is very nice: only 405,399 deaths. Far better than Lincoln. The second line looks even better: the war created seventeen million new jobs safe from bombs or bullets. But the bottom line is not so good: the Russians know they have been lied to, they have lost twenty million, and the Red Army is ensconced in Central Europe.

Churchillian Challenge

At that point, a disinterested observer from another galaxy might reasonably have expected Americans to face up to the price of their imperial way of life, perhaps even to consider an alternative. Now Winston Spencer Churchill was hardly disinterested, but he did his best to educate Americans about the elementary facts of imperial life. The fascinating and revealing part of our response to Winnie's tutorials is how we accepted his recommendation to stand firm while ignoring his advice—indeed, his pleas—to negotiate a clear, explicit and rational imperial settlement.

There are two primary explanations for that response. On the one hand, we simply could not confront the truth that we were an empire and so act responsibly as an empire. On the other hand, we could not imagine any alternative to empire as a way of life. Hence we revived Lincoln's policy of containment, extended Theodore Roosevelt's corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and set out once again to save the world for democracy—get hold of History and make it conform.

Nothing documents that as clearly as National Security Council Document No. 68, approved by President Harry S. Truman in April 1950. Notice first two things about that date: it is before the eruption of the Korean War and it is more than two years after Churchill almost begged us to come to terms with reality. Furthermore, NSC-68 is a reaffirmation and extension of NSC-20/4 of November 1948, which also came after Churchill's efforts to save us from ourselves.

NSC-68 begins with a disturbed review of how all the old empires have collapsed. It summarizes that overview with this revealing conclusion: *"Even if there were no Soviet Union we would face the great problem . . . [that] the absence of order among nations is becoming less and less tolerable."* Then, defining the United States as the only nation capable of imposing such order, it makes the Soviet Union the focus of the effort. It candidly admits Churchill's main point: the United States and its allies possess greater power—enough to deter any direct attack.

But, unlike Churchill, American leaders concluded that such power must be further increased and deployed to "foster a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet system"; "foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system," and foment and support "unrest and revolt in selected strategic satellite countries." As for means: "any means, covert or overt, violent or nonviolent." Then, pointing to the experience of World War II, the policy makers confidently predicted that the increase in military spending would prevent the possibility of any socially and politically explosive "real decrease in the standard of living."

III.

In a rare moment of candor, Secretary of State Dean Acheson admitted in 1953 that he and Truman might not have been able to sustain their grandiose imperial policy if the North Koreans had not "come along and saved us."

On balance, however, it was simply one of those wars that anybody could have counted on to erupt sometime. Both halves of that divided country were dying to go to war to unite themselves. That old deb'l nationalism had been raised to fever pitch by very strong shots of mutually exclusive theology. In any event, the debate about who bears ultimate responsibility obscures the fundamental issue of the response by Truman and Acheson.

Clearly, when the Secretary acknowledged that Korea "saved us," he did not mean in the sense of preventing the defeat or the destruction of the United States. He meant only that it allowed the Government to implement the apocalyptic imperial strategy of NSC-68. Primed and ready, armed (or driven) psychologically as well as with the heady rhetoric of that document, they simply went to war. They bypassed the Congress and the public and confronted both with an accomplished fact. A few phone calls, and it was done. Go to bed at peace and wake up at war.

It was even more dramatic than the subsequent intervention in Vietnam as a demonstration of the centralization of power inherent in empire as a way of life. The State had literally been com-

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pressed or consolidated into the President and his like-minded appointees. In a marvelously revealing description, underscoring Truman's earlier lecture to the Cabinet, the war without a declaration of war was called a "police action." Ironically, the most succinct commentary applicable to Truman's remark was provided by an early editor of *The New York Times*. "We are the most ambitious people the world has ever seen," noted Henry J. Raymond on May 30, 1864, "—& I greatly fear we shall sacrifice our liberties to our imperial dreams."

Empire at Bay

The military containment and subsequent rout of North Korean forces (by the end of September 1950) created a moment of imperial euphoria. American leaders were high on NSC-68. The United States undertook to liberate North Korea by conquest and integrate it into the American empire. It was assumed in Washington that such action would accelerate the process of disintegration within and between Russia and China and so finally create an open-door world. Then came the moment of truth, and the empire suddenly found itself at bay. The Chinese entered the war with massive force on October 26 and drove the Americans southward to the line that originally divided Korea.

Once again one thinks of the way American leaders failed to comprehend the willingness of black citizens to settle for promises of future equality and freedom at home. They had first misread and misapplied that episode in their dealings with the Russians, then with the Chinese and, finally, with increasing frequency, in Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The mistaken assumption that other poor and demeaned peoples would display similar forbearance almost seemed like the cosmic cost of such prejudice and racism.

The Roosevelts, the Trumans and the Achesons, and most of their successors, fundamentally misconceived the deeply patriotic—even loving—commitment of American blacks to what Martin Luther King Jr. called The Dream of America. And because they could not acknowledge the existence of an American empire, they could not comprehend—let alone understand—that other so-called inferiors felt the same love for their cultures; and that, viewing America as an empire that threatened the integrity and existence of their cultures, they would ultimately fight rather than accept indirect destruction.

The empire had been brought to bay. Dwight David Eisenhower understood that essential truth, and further realized that the future character of American society depended upon how the culture responded. His first objective after he became President in 1952 was to end the Korean police action before it spiraled into World War III. That accomplished, he set about to calm Americans, cool them off and refocus their attention and energies on domestic development. He was a far more perceptive and cagey leader than many people realized at the time—or later.

The image of a rather absent-minded, sometimes bumbling if not incoherent Uncle Ike was largely his own shrewd cover for his serious efforts to get control of the military (and other militant cold warriors), to decrease tension with Russia and somehow begin to deal with the fundamental distortions of American society. He clearly understood that crusading imperial police actions were extremely dangerous, and he was determined to avoid World War III. When Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt in 1956 over the nationalization of the Suez Canal, the President called British Prime Minister Anthony Eden and scolded him sharply: "Anthony, you must have gone out of your mind."

When the moment came, Eisenhower could be just as blunt with Americans. A good many of them were probably shocked when, in his farewell address of 1961, he spoke candidly and forcefully about the military-industrial complex that since 1939 had become the axis of the American political economy. That was such a catchy phrase that not many of them noticed that he went on to assault the distortion of education involved in that consolidation of power. The historically free and critical university, he noted, "the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. . . . A governmental contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity."

The speech was not an aberration: Eisenhower had become ever more deeply concerned with those issues after retiring from the Army. Thus, while it is true that he was not an intellectual, and

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was conservative in many ways, it is also true that he had a firm sense of how the State had gradually taken over the very process of creating and controlling basic ideas—the ways of making sense of reality. Or, in a different way, how the State used its extensive control of information, and its ability to make major decisions in the name of security, to create an ideology ever more defined in content as well as rhetoric as an imperial way of life.

Eisenhower's most serious weakness did not lie in his fidelity to a rudimentary version of marketplace economics, or even in his excessive caution about how quickly and how far he could move the American citizenry away from its imperial obsessions with Russia, China and other revolutionary movements. It was defined by his unwillingness to translate his valid perceptions into strong policies and active, sustained leadership. He lacked Hoover's (or even Churchill's) toughness about accepting the limits of American power and the former President's knowledge that the only way to deal with the costly and unhealthy consequences of empire was to begin creating a different way of life. Given his charisma, Eisenhower could have initiated that process and perhaps even created an irreversible momentum.

Enter the New Frontier

Failing to do that, he left no dynamic legacy. The militant advocates of the global imperial way of life quickly reasserted their power and policy. They, too, recognized that the Chinese counterintervention in Korea had brought the empire to a critical juncture. Their response was to reassert American power and get on with policing the world in the name of benevolent progress. Led by John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and calling themselves the New Frontiersmen, they perfectly expressed the psychopathology of the empire at bay and its consequences. Onward and outward in the spirit of NSC-68. "Ask not what your country can do for you," intoned Kennedy in his 1961 inaugural address, "ask what you can do for your country." By country, of course, they meant *their* Government.

Kennedy and his advisers had the brilliant perception to talk about the empire in the classic idiom of the frontier. That propaganda gem is of itself almost enough to justify honoring them as the cleverest imperial leaders of their generation. The best that Henry Kissinger could do a few years later, for example, was to blurt out a crude reference to the same idiom—presenting himself as Gary Cooper in *High Noon*. The excessively self-conscious Dr. Cowboy will ride on stage in good time, but for the moment let us concentrate on those Kennedy hands who were born and bred to empire.

"Our frontiers today," cried Kennedy, "are on every continent." America has "obligations," he explained, "which stretch ten thousand miles across the Pacific, and three and four thousand miles across the Atlantic, and thousands of miles to the south. Only the United States—and we are only six percent of the world's population—bears this kind of burden." He understandably neglected to mention that the burden on the metropolis was somewhat eased by the benefits of controlling a grossly disproportionate percentage of the world's resources. He was more concerned with creating the psychological mood of impending doom: "The tide of events has been running out and time has not been our friend."

The failure of the effort early in 1961 to overthrow Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba intensified that trauma. Not only did the rhetoric become ever more apocalyptic ("this time of maximum danger") but Kennedy immediately began a massive military buildup in the spirit of NSC-68 (three special requests for extra funds during 1961). Then he indulged himself in a truly arrogant and irresponsible act. Knowing that the United States enjoyed a massive superiority in strategic weapons, Kennedy publicly goaded, even insulted, the Soviet Union about its gross inferiority.

He scared the Russians viscerally, and in the process not only prompted them to launch a desperate effort to correct the vast imbalance but very probably touched off the internal Soviet dialogue that led to the confrontation in 1962 over Russian missiles in Cuba. The more evidence that appears about that moment on the edge of the abyss, the more it seems probable that the Russians never had any intention of going to war. Taken with all appropriate skepticism, for example, Premier Nikita Khrushchev's account very likely contains the essence of the truth: Moscow was less concerned with the possibility of a second invasion of Cuba than with somehow—even at sizable risk—jarring Washington into a realization that, if pushed to the wall, the Russians would fight rather than surrender. Given their grave inferiority, the only way they could make that point was by creating a situation that would dramatize for Americans the threat as experienced daily by the Soviet Union.

Kennedy's understanding of that message was limited. He spoke of the need to avoid further such crises, but he clearly felt that America had regained the initiative, that he was now free to deploy American forces to prevent or control further change that might weaken the American empire. He did talk about accepting diversity among the poor and developing nations, and about programs to facilitate some social and economic improvements in Latin America and other countries. And he did make some efforts, as in the Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps, to act on that rhetoric. But he also embarked upon an obsessive campaign to murder Castro, and he deployed between 15,000 and 20,000 American troops (many of them in the field as advisers) to intervene in the revolutionary civil war in Vietnam. Those frontiers on every continent were going to remain frontiers in the traditional American meaning of a frontier—a region to penetrate and control and police and civilize.

What Hath Imperialism Wrought

This essay, an effort to review our development as an empire and to encourage a searching dialogue among ourselves about the character of our culture, does not attempt to offer a detailed reconstruction of American foreign policy. Hence it would be a contradiction in terms to wander off into a blow-by-blow account of recent events. But it does seem useful to explore some of the contemporary aspects of our imperial way of life.

Let us begin with the relationship between NSC-68 and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s; and let us assume that American leaders, whatever their prejudices or racism, believed that the empire would provide blacks and other disadvantaged groups (including poor whites) with greater opportunities and rewards. Their most popular euphemism for empire—*growth*—was invoked on the ground that even the same share of an ever larger pie would produce improvement for everyone. And elitists like Acheson had reason to believe that the minorities and other

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poor would continue to be patient until the fruits of empire were harvested.

But the war in Korea, and the related increase in military spending, revealed the true priorities of the empire and hence dramatized the discrepancy involved in talking about empire in terms of liberty, freedom, equality and welfare while denying those benefits to large numbers of people at home. That contradiction was further highlighted by the nonviolent nature of black protest against being denied elementary equity on the buses of Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 and in the eating places of Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960. Some white Americans recognized and became upset about that contrast, but neither Eisenhower nor Kennedy devised an effective response. The former was socially and politically too conservative and cautious, and the latter was more concerned with standing up to the Russians all along America's global frontier.

L.B.J.'s Tragedy

But Lyndon Baines Johnson did make a brave—and in the end tragic—effort to resolve that visceral contradiction in the imperial way of life. He tried to make major improvements in the quality of life for the poor and disadvantaged of all colors (and therefore for all other Americans) and at the same time secure the frontier in Indochina. That proved to be impossible because by 1964-65 the dynamics of empire as a way of life left him no room to maneuver. Given the legacy of prejudice and racism, and the global definition of America's political economy and its security as formulated in NSC-68, Johnson was trying to swim in the sky. But at least he tried.

Stated bluntly, the President could not muster the votes to help the poor at home unless he honored the imperial ethic in Vietnam. He simply did not enjoy the personal and political advantages that enabled Eisenhower to move quietly toward a less grandiose foreign policy. That meant that any effort to make structural reforms at home would provoke a militant reaction around the classic imperial theme of "Who Lost Whatever Wherever?"

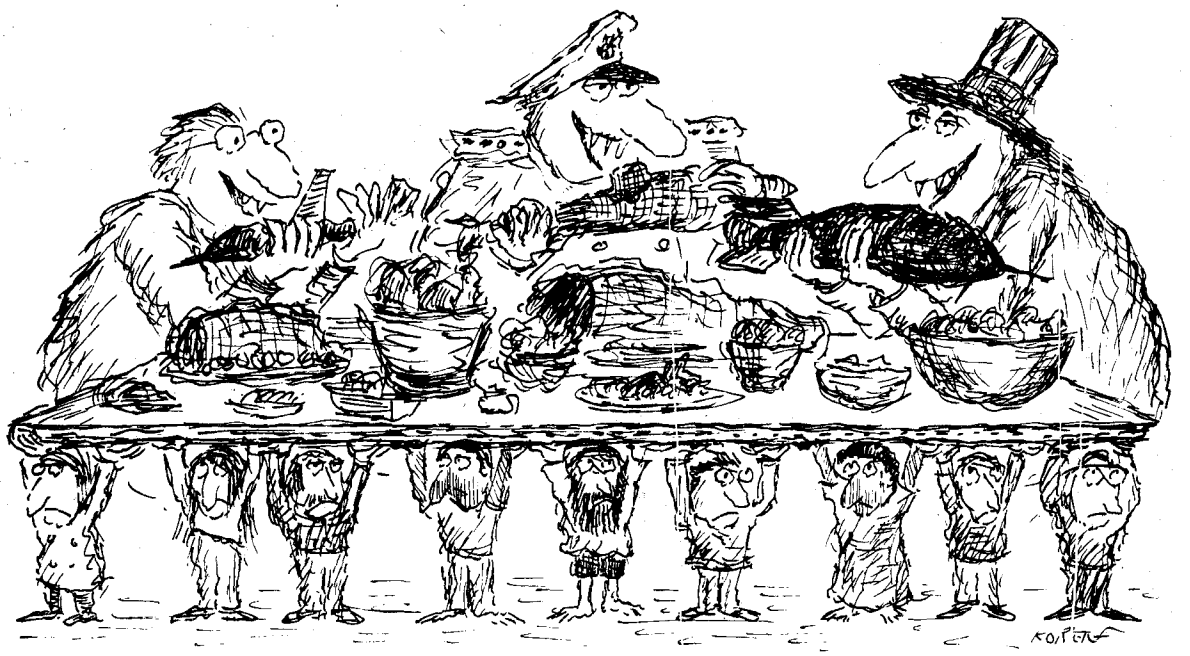
Johnson first tried to finesse the war issue. Therein lies the stuff of great drama. A modern Shakespeare might well do it this way: If only Johnson had gone with his instinct as a Southerner to recognize in the Vietcong the American blacks driven to violence, then he might—just might—have begun the process whereby Americans said no to empire and yes to the vision of community. But the imperial North had forever scarred the South. Left it resentful and determined to prove its valor and its equality. There is a great play in that old fear of the South transformed into a recognition of the truth that one either frees the slaves or confronts a rebellion. But the North had failed to learn that lesson during Reconstruction after the Civil War, and so Johnson had no allies to help him redefine the truth of America.

So from finessing the war Johnson moved to lying about the war. His effort to stand firm on the frontier while effecting reforms at home led him to create enormous inflationary pressures within the economy and to engage in ever more serious self-deception and public dissembling to sustain popular support for the imperial war. In the end, that is to say, Johnson was the victim of the basic fear, so candidly expressed in NSC-68, that America was fundamentally threatened by *any* disorder in the world (a fear also revealed in the President's intervention in Santo Domingo).

That fog of trepidation and dread continued to influence the conduct of foreign affairs by President Richard Milhous Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Their bone-marrow anxiety provides the key to resolving the apparent paradox in a diplomacy that sought to stabilize relations with the Russians while simultaneously recognizing the Communist Government of China, falsifying official records to hide an illegal and devastating expansion of the Vietnamese war into Cambodia, launching an effort to subvert an *elected* socialist Government in Chile and supporting a dictatorship in Iran that was instrumental in raising oil prices.

Kissinger's Geopolitics

No one yet knows the precise nature of the relationship between Nixon and Kissinger. But Kissinger could not have functioned as he did without the support of the President. The Secretary of State has provided the most information about the assumptions that underlay their policies, and it seems apparent that they recognized that the grand



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objective of NSC-68—the subversion of the Soviet Union—was no longer realistic. Kissinger had long agreed with Churchill, for example, that the United States should have negotiated a broad settlement with the Russians in 1947-48, and concluded during the 1950s that American policy had "reached an impasse."

Thus it was necessary to stabilize the existing balance between the two superpowers. The first step on that road, at least in their view, was to assert their power over the bureaucracies in the State Department and other branches of Government—a task Kissinger undertook with great relish as an exercise of his own ego in the service of his great-man interpretation of history. That done, Kissinger could begin the effort to order and balance the world.

He now and again admitted the impossibility of doing that without a clear conception of such a system, and likewise spoke of the importance of justice, but he never provided either the vision or the definition of justice. Indeed, Kissinger had little patience with anyone who was concerned with the character of the world order he invoked so often. In one classic instance, for example, he dismissed such people for "confusing social reform with geopolitics." Yet his favorite word to define geopolitics was "equilibrium"—little more than a fancy synonym for order. As for justice, Kissinger might usefully have remembered the rabbi's wisdom about Deuteronomy 16:20: "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue." Asked why the word justice is repeated, the rabbi explained that it was done to emphasize the necessity of pursuing justice *with* justice.

Given the Nixon-Kissinger willingness to settle for controlling nothing more than the world outside Russia and Eastern Europe, their policy of détente and strategic arms control was a rational first step toward that objective. And it is certainly arguable that their approach to China (despite their tactics of secrecy and shock) was on balance a positive and stabilizing maneuver as long as it was not allowed to become a part of a new strategy of containment designed to destabilize the Soviet Union. And that caveat applies to subsequent American leaders as well as to Nixon and Kissinger.

The weaknesses of the Nixon-Kissinger approach became clear in their dealings with the rest of the world. On the one hand, they defined stabilization as allowing the United States to decide what was permissible and impermissible beyond the Soviet sphere. But, on the other hand, they lacked any significant comprehension or understanding of the dynamic, causal interrelationships between economics, politics and social affairs within the poor regions of the world, or between the global rich and poor. Hence they mistakenly linked any changes not approved or controlled by the United States to the influence of the Russians. The unhappy results became most apparent in Cambodia, Chile and Iran.

The unconstitutional bombing of Cambodia, which clearly did more to destroy the fabric and morale of that society than the incursion of the North Vietnamese which Kissinger used to justify the monstrous act, is in some respects less revealing of their diplomacy than their actions in Chile and Iran.* The American Ambassador to Chile began his report on that nation's Presidential election of 1970 with these words: "Chile voted *calmly* to have a Marxist-Leninist state, the first nation in the world to make this choice *freely and knowingly*." [Italics added.] In keeping with the primary responsibility of a foreign service officer, that is an essentially factual report; although adding the term *Leninist* to Marxist has long been the routine ploy used by those in power in America to turn an avowed socialist into a Communist pawn of the Kremlin. The ambassador then offered, in a wholly legitimate way, his evaluation of the evidence: it was in his view "a grievous defeat" for the United States.

Kissinger's account of America's subsequent efforts to prevent Salvador Allende from becoming President of Chile, and later to destabilize and subvert his Government, is remarkable for its conscious and unconscious revelations about the Nixon-Kissinger conduct of foreign affairs. Before Allende became President, for example, Kissinger presents the man as a doctrinaire Communist in the Russian mold. Once Allende becomes President, however, Kissinger talks about the *possibility* that he will *become* such a puppet. In a similar way, the former Secretary of State stresses Allende's narrow plurality in 1970 without once noting, even in a footnote, that Allende increased his vote in the next election, which was held in accordance with Chile's constitution.

All that tells us more than Kissinger intended us to know, but he is even more illuminating when he insists that "our concern with Allende was based on national security, not on economics," and proceeds to emphasize "American interests in the hemisphere." There are three responses. First, Kissinger cannot seriously expect the observer to believe that Washington was worried about the Russians' turning Chile into a base for a strategic—geopolitical—military attack on the United States. Even he admits that the matter had been settled during the Cuban missile crisis, and, for that matter, refined during his tenure in the basement of the White House.

Second, if Kissinger did in truth not consider economic interests as an integral part of national security ("American interests in the hemisphere"), then one must conclude that he was stunningly obtuse and probably not qualified to be Secretary of State in the world's premier capitalist political economy.**

Third, in view of Kissinger's presentation of himself as a realist, he wholly ignores the feasibility of working with an elected socialist government as a hard-headed as well as moral strategy to counter the Soviet appeal in the Third World and to give hope to all democratic reformers in the poor nations. American leaders seem to be limited in their sight to the left by benevolent dictators like Marshall Josip Tito of Yugoslavia.

The Secretary's performance in dealing with Iran offers support for all those criticisms. Give him his due: he has quietly and cryptically admitted that his comprehension of the relationships between economic, political and social development was less than sophisticated. Hardly even rudimentary. But that is only part of the explanation of his failure in Iran. For it is extremely doubtful that anyone could control

*Although everyone concerned with the Cambodian matter is indebted to William Shawcross's *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), it is important to remember that the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee raised and defined the issue during its consideration of the bill of particulars for the impeachment of Richard Nixon.

**It is possible, of course, that Kissinger made his disavowal in the hope of defusing the criticism that economic concerns were involved in the effort to subvert an elected government. If so, his sensitivity to the charge is revealing in its own right; and, in any event, he would have been better advised to be candid to avoid the thought that he was incompetent.

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events in the non-Soviet world. Asked for his comment on the matter, Karl Marx would have laughed aloud in the reading room of the British Museum.

Still and all, it is difficult to imagine how anyone of Kissinger's intelligence could combine more errors of perception, understanding, analysis and policy in dealing with Iran. Neither he nor Nixon exhibited any sense of that nation's history, or even of its intensely religious and nationalistic pride. And they obviously assumed that Iranians had accepted or forgotten that the United States had grossly intervened to control the resources and the government of that country even before overthrowing an elected government in the 1950s.

Given all that, it is not surprising that they embarked upon a policy doomed to failure. In embracing and arming the Shah, in truth a petty despot, they committed America's geopolitical interests to a government guaranteed to generate ever growing internal opposition to its pretensions. And in supporting, even encouraging, the despot to raise the price of oil to pay for his Tinkertoy regime they undercut the foundation of the American imperial way of life they sought to preserve.

The oil crisis is not a simple matter of the poor determined to become rich. It defines far more important issues. It asks to what lengths the United States is prepared to deny its commitment to self-determination, to freedom and liberty, in order to preserve its imperial way of life. The Palestinians are as much human beings as the Israelis. And so we come ever closer to the dangers inherent in lying to ourselves about our imperial way of life.

The Oil-Fired Empire

America began to produce oil near Titusville, Pennsylvania, on August 27, 1859. Fifty years later the United States pumped more than the rest of the world combined. The political economy of capitalism shifted away from coal and neglected to explore other sources of energy. There was a short but intense oil scare between 1917 and 1924, a hullabaloo created by the Navy shifting to oil-fired turbines, the Mexican revolution, the boom in automobiles and airplanes, the beginnings of the petrochemical industry and the struggle for market supremacy (and survival) among American petroleum corporations.

That crisis disappeared in the cloud of confidence puffed up by the finding of new reserves abroad (as in Venezuela), by new discoveries at home (as in Texas), by more efficient exploration and production at home and—most particularly—by gaining access to the vast reserves in Saudi Arabia and other poor and weak countries in the Middle East. No better example ever of the rewards of empire as a way of life. But make no mistake, we also came to rely on other cheap materials from the provinces.

The United States continued to produce half the world's oil until, in 1948, it became a net *importer* of oil. True imperial dependency upon the natives. But a statement by John McCloy that we *should* "have our cake and eat it too" perfectly captures the euphoria of the imperial way of life as applied to oil. Americans, citizens as well as leaders, simply assumed that they could sell their oil abroad for a good profit while importing it from the provinces at *pennies a barrel.*

The imperial way of life was disrupted by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries in 1973-74. But the oil-fired empire, once symbolized by the Navy and now by intercontinental bombers, could not talk about the problem in a realistic way simply because it had never come to terms with its imperial way of life. The euphemisms began to dissolve. The United States supported the creation of Israel for three reasons: a commitment to the principle of self-determination, the financial and political power of Jews in domestic American politics and the imperial usefulness of Israel as a client state in the oil-rich Middle East. The problem was that the Palestinians also had a right to self-determined nationhood, and oil was a most effective way to make that point.

And so the crisis deepened. Kissinger said it all in one sentence: The United States must somehow "shape events in the light of our own purposes." A marvelously subtle definition of empire. But note particularly that *somehow.* What a wonderful way of avoiding any coming to terms with the reality of empire. But to evade that moment of truth means again going to war.

No candor, more flight from reality. More flight, no peace. No chance finally to confront the central challenge:

Is the idea and reality of America possible without empire?

IV.

We come full circle. History never provides programmatic answers. But it does guide one to ask the right questions—and that is crucial to developing the right answers.

It all calls to mind, once again, the wise observation offered by Carl Becker. We Americans must "be always transforming the world into [our] idea of it." Such a culture, "knowing that it is right, . . . wishes only to go ahead. Satisfied with certain conventional premises, it hastens on to the obvious conclusion." More than a bit like Wright Morris—we do duck off.

What are the right questions? I suggest that they are the same ones that Eugene Debs and Charles Beard—even Herbert Hoover—began to ask two generations ago. Asking the right questions is what we are about. I do not think that even Debs, let alone Beard or Hoover, have given us the right answers. Those people are important because they asked the right questions.

The best thing that can be said for our American empire is that we produced some very good questions. Now is the time to begin answering those questions.

Say regional socialism: push through the implications of the Tennessee Valley Authority, for example; or . . . whatever you have given serious thought to developing into a program.

I like to return to the question raised by our history.

Is the idea and reality of America possible without empire?

Can you even imagine America as not an empire?

I think often these days about the relationship between those two words—imagination and empire—and wonder if they are incompatible.

The truth of it is that I think they are incompatible.

So there we are.

Do you want to imagine a new America or do you want to preserve the empire?

Now, as surely we all know, preserving the empire is an exercise in futility. We will sizzle or suffocate.

So let us get on with imagining a new America.

Once we imagine it, break out of the imperial idiom, we just might be able to create a nonimperial America. □

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COMMENTS.

Lawrence Goodwyn

Americans find themselves in the beginning stages of a reappraisal of the assumptions that historically have guided our foreign policy. Much hinges on how thorough we permit ourselves to be in the conduct of this national rethinking. Will it be a fundamental reappraisal or a mere reshuffling of recent evidence?

William Appleman Williams has made it clear just how sweeping this inquiry must be: we need to rethink our own view of ourselves and our history. Anything less will constitute evasion of a kind that cannot possibly alter a global policy that is inexorably isolating America from the rest of the world. Nothing less will enable the American people to recover, and thus draw new sustenance from, those of our founding traditions that for two centuries have beckoned humanity along paths of democratic possibility.

Empire or democracy? Not only are we unaccustomed to hearing foreign policy options framed in such stark terms, we have as a people almost no experience in thinking within any context of such polar definition. This is so for the elemental reason that we have habitually viewed the process of empire building as an exercise in democratic practice. Williams brings unwanted evidence that "empire as a way of life" has been an organic drive of American development. Such a thought is an inadmissible idea within the contemporary American mainstream. It is simply not culturally sanctioned to think in such a manner, to entertain such a possibility.

Accordingly, it will require more than one essay or one book to shatter this dangerous cultural cocoon. But Professor Williams, a distinguished historian building on a lifetime of careful inquiry in foreign affairs and writing at the height of his powers, has demonstrated precisely how we can "look our imperial history in the eye without blinking."

The rest is up to us. In one sense the issue is a simple test of our capacity to think. But for reasoned dialogue to happen—for thinking to become public—the challenge more deeply tests our political ability to fashion a national climate in which such creative dialogue can take place. What makes this latter task so difficult is the crippled condition of our national forums for analysis and debate. Simply stated, these instruments of discussion—the two major political parties, the media, the universities, the popular culture itself—have become critically influenced by the very forces of corporate centralization that impelled America along the path of empire in the first place. Indeed, it is this very conquest of American culture by corporate values that blinds us to the narrowness of our most routine patriotic premises: Because empire has become a way of life we cannot imagine that our imperial policies are imperial. Rather, they are seen, easily enough, as a "defense of freedom."

The corporate panacea, like the Bolshevik panacea, stands indicted by the history of the twentieth century. Finding a third way, a democratic way, is the task of our time on the planet. It is the only serious "politics" I know. The immediate business at hand is to recruit millions of Americans to this necessarily national effort. Williams has given all democrats useful tools for the task. His conclusion is precise and accurate: We have to give ourselves permission to imagine a new America. □

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Robert Lekachman

The benefits of imperialism for mature societies are mostly economic—access to markets, outlets for investment and secure supplies of raw materials at favorable prices. As recently as the Eisenhower regime, this country possessed the will and the means to install suitable regimes in Iran and elsewhere in pursuit of such objectives.

Williams brings to mind in the present context two linked questions. Now that the bills from the Third World are coming in, beginning with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' huge initial installment, how much economic growth will be attainable during the rest of this century? If growth slows or stops, if ours becomes a zero-sum society, can our democratic institutions, flawed as they already are by the corruptions of wealth and commercialism, survive? For the American myth has been not only one of empire, it has even more been a promise of unlimited personal opportunity and upward social and financial mobility.

Zero-sum societies offer slower promotions, smaller rewards for college degrees and much greater probability that the children of blue- and white-collar families will dress like their parents. This is not a pleasant affair and the usual reaction of the frustrated has already begun to manifest itself in 1980 politics. The social sympathies of the middle class, never overwhelmingly warm, have diminished to the point of invisibility, and the consequences include complacency at the spectacle of high unemployment, diminishing welfare benefits, eroding public services and rapid loss of the small gains made by blacks and women through affirmative action. The spectacle of Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter jostling each other en route to the political right, where they fancy the votes to be, signalizes the intensified scramble for individual and group advantage which the cessation of growth has stimulated.

The upshot? It is hard to be cheerful. The best of outcomes no doubt is the least likely: the emergence of a powerful political left, alert to a new and unfamiliar American imperative, the need to attend to neglected issues of equity and redistribution of income and wealth. Rather more likely, I fear, is some version of Bertram Gross's friendly fascism or, perhaps, a form of national economic planning dominated by our major corporations. If indeed our better traditions pull us through this crisis, we shall emerge a different and improved society. I hope so. I should want favorable odds before staking my fortune on the outcome. □

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Walter Dean Burnham

I agree with much of the analysis that Professor Williams gives us in these pages. But his work places great stress on the argument that there once were serious alternative historical possibilities which—regrettably—were not pursued. I doubt that such alternative possibilities ever really existed. In its heyday, this empire—like its predecessors and rivals—was strongly supported by domestic public opinion. Many or most Americans profited from its existence in one way or another, especially in its global, post-1945 variant. They knew that they profited from it. They had a single set of master political ideas, those associated with liberal capitalism. This set of ideas was admirably suited for reinforcing, and being reinforced by, hegemonic power interests. No organizable domestic counterweight, whether radical or socialist, could or did take root in such a setting. Competitors in the electoral market have uniformly accepted the fact and ends of empire since 1945, if indeed not long before then. Their disagreements are over means. In this they reflect and mold the attitudes of the market's consuming public.

For many reasons, the American empire has fallen on evil days during the past decade. Pressures are now very strong and growing to return to its Golden Age. The immense restorationist effort that is coming will gain momentum as the leadership of the Soviet rival continues to do what comes naturally to imperial elites on the make. Most probably, then, this line of least effort will be the course followed and popularly supported during the 1980s. As Williams and others have stressed, the empire and modern American history are virtually inseparable from each other. Public support for imperial restoration will probably be widespread, at least to the extent that it could be accomplished without nuclear war or mass personal and family bankruptcy. We do not lack political entrepreneurs who assure us that these conditions can be fulfilled. Nor do we lack for true believers among the electoral market's consuming public.

To be sure, the risks multiply that pursuit of this line of least resistance will promote what Bertram Gross has called "friendly fascism" at home, not to mention an enhanced likelihood of physical annihilation. But I suspect that there are not a few Americans, including some now or soon to be in high places, who would rather die with the empire than live without it. As in the past, the total absence in our domestic politics of any genuine politically organized alternatives to ideological and organizational hegemony simply maximizes the likelihood that imperial restoration will be the order of the day. Of course, such alternatives could come into existence in the near future. But this would require a major change in consciousness of world-historic proportions. There is no convincing evidence of any such thing—least of all in an electoral year that has given us the choice of Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, or John Anderson.

I should like to believe that a nonimperial future exists for the United States. Each of us can imagine what he will, including a postimperial America. But to what end if the imagining lacks realism? Consider the exchange between Glendower and Hotspur in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*: "I can call spirits from the vasty deep." "Why, so can I, or so can any man; But will they come when you do call for them?" My own suspicion is that imagining America as substantially other than what it is—especially in light of the historical record—will remain at best a twilight exercise until we are much closer to outright catastrophe than we are now. Until the futilities of preserving the empire are concretely reflected in bankruptcy and terror on a widespread, day-to-day basis, no consciousness-raising is likely to occur. Even then, how can we dismiss the vital role of Soviet imperialism in all this? It actively sustains the American quest for imperial restoration, as its leaders seek out targets of opportunity opened up by the decline of American world power. This interaction between the drives of Soviet elites and the interests of American elites makes any *practical* imagining of a nonimperial America peculiarly difficult. After all, even paranoids can have real enemies.

There is no question in my mind that the United States is in the grip of a real crisis of regime. Whoever wins in 1980, this crisis will deepen for the foreseeable future. As Antonio Gramsci so well put it, "the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears." The pressure to escape, one way or another, from this interregnum will be intense, precisely because of the existence of vast imperial interests. There are well-known ways out of this blocked situation. Perhaps the least likely is the evolution of a pacific, democratic-socialist America: for in the last analysis, one cannot make bricks without straw. □

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Philip Green

Professor Williams has let the cat out of the bag—internationalism, genuine internationalism, is the "dirty little secret" of American radicalism. It's not that radicals are necessarily "unpatriotic"; in fact, more often than not, our radicalism is ineradicably American in its presuppositions, and generally the non-Maoist left always tries to insist that it is speaking for "the real America."

No, the problem is not the left's lack of patriotism but its lack of patriotism's obscene counterfeit, nationalism. For what cannot be denied is that any genuine left opposes capitalist hegemony abroad as well as at home; and since Americans who are victims of the latter also think of themselves as beneficiaries of the former, what looks like an unbridgeable gap is opened up. At a superficial glance there seems to be no two ways about it: a just redistribution of access to the world's resources means a cut in the American standard of living (much scholarly literature as well seems to bear out that supposition: see Richard Barnett and Ronald Muller's *Global Reach*).

Various theorists have tried to paper over that gap, with panaceas ranging from the "small is beautiful," ecological-doom-is-upon-us approach to con-

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fident assertions that by generating *internal* redistribution of wealth we can have our populist cake and eat it too. As for the new ecological consciousness movement, ideas of retrenchment are, if not elitist, at least genuinely unpopular, not least among those who have little to retrench.

As to redistribution, a combination of democratic socialism—planned development and deployment of resources under genuine community control, with necessary sacrifices made equally by all—combined with Herbert Hoover's vision of national self-sufficiency is very appealing on paper. The example of Thomas Jefferson, though, reminds us how difficult it is to put democratic self-sufficiency into practice. Certainly right now a majority of the American people are convinced that it's easier to control the world abroad than reform ourselves at home. The other dilemmas of radicalism (e.g., the racial question) seem to me to be (again on paper) almost easy to resolve by comparison. This one hurts.

As for partisan politics, the profound cultural alienation that real "internationalism" calls forth is not a helpful stance. I cannot take the Democratic Party very seriously as long as its leaders *and* followers seem deeply committed to the retention of hegemony. But I cannot take seriously either sectarian movements like the Citizens Party that are forced essentially to repudiate the American people whose support is supposedly being solicited by them. If someone can show how to make the surrender of hegemony—in a context of renewed Soviet adventurism!—compatible with an American mass movement for social change, that will be this century's greatest contribution to American political thought. It ought to be possible to persuade people that development of our own resources under democratic controls is potentially more productive than pumping out other people's resources with neutron bombs. Moral exhortation to us to be nice to the rest of the world is not a satisfactory substitute. □

Norman Birnbaum

Professor Williams reminds us, if reminder were needed, of the profound inertial forces of our foreign policy. The first is economic: the acquisition of cheap raw materials, the global expansion of American capital, the use of some of the gains to contain domestic discontent. The second is political: the identification by bureaucrats and politicians of the imperial state apparatus with our entire public life. The third is cultural: the inextricable fusion of Calvinist self-righteousness (even when propagated by lost descendants of the Baltic or Polish gentry, Jewish professors and Irish senators) and provincialism which is our imperial ideology. Dissenters are dealt with expeditiously. Who listens to Robert McNamara, who has quite intentionally done penance for his Pentagon period by working at the World Bank? And would not any elite with a sense of self-respect have honored Cyrus Vance by proposing him for the Presidency or Vice Presidency?

Williams is right to suggest that the imperial idea has migrated westward from Europe. The Europeans (the Soviet Union excepted, to be sure) want none of it any longer. Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle, who called for rational negotiations with the Soviet Union, have successors: Lord Carrington, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Helmut Schmidt. Our imperial apparatus is so disturbed that it acts as if the precondition for our national survival were not the end of a Soviet threat but the immediate termination of Western European independence. Zbigniew Brzezinski may play at setting the Central Intelligence Agency loose in Western Europe; the Republicans will be serious about it. Meanwhile, the American imperial synthesis is disintegrating. Senator Jesse Helms, calling for confrontation with China and the Soviet Union simultaneously, for a worldwide counterattack on "revolution," will not have any truck with the Trilateralists. The matter is more serious than *Commentary*'s embarrassment at its alignment with this stern proponent of a "Christian America." The reduction of imperial ideology to primitivism renders our elites incapable of controlling the forces they seek to use. The defeat of Wall Street (Alan Greenspan) and the Gerald Ford-Henry Kissinger team at Detroit was hardly balanced by placing the WASP weakling George Bush on the Republican ticket. More than the indignant anti-cosmopolitanism (and anti-Semitism) of the Republican right is at issue. A sophisticated empire might survive, in a nation 13 percent black, 17 percent Hispanic, with an aroused women's movement and an educated populace generally. The degeneration of imperialism to proto-fascism entails the threat of prolonged political and social conflict.

Some Democrats see this, among them the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. In its platform statement, the C.D.M. was quite explicit as to its appeal. "Only by strengthening our domestic economy can we muster the resources necessary to restore our nation's position in the world. Only by rebuilding our military strength and conducting a more resolute foreign policy can we be assured access to the resources and commerce that we need to continue progress at home. As Senator Daniel P. Moynihan has put it, 'a weak America will be a poor America.' " Senator Moynihan, it appears, will have to argue in the first instance with Secretary of State Edmund Muskie. In response to the Republican call for tens of billions of dollars of additional arms expenditure, Muskie asked if the American people were ready to pay the price.

It remains to be seen if Muskie will find the convictions of his courage. The American people are singularly reluctant to send their children into battle. Even Ronald Reagan has not dared to propose conscription. It is high praise of our countrymen and countrywomen to say that we lack an imperial vocation—in these not unessential respects. The Republicans having opted for empire and war, will the Democratic Party abandon Carter's recent crisis rhetoric, seek a new approach to defense, a new alliance with the West Europeans? Those of us who remember voting for Lyndon Johnson in 1964 will require more than words. Brzezinski's departure to write a book (or better, to read one) would be but a beginning. Muskie would have to depart from the anti-Communist turgidities of two decades ago. The millions of Democrats who, if not historians, share much of Professor Williams's viewpoint are open to persuasion. Time is very short: we have alternatives. □

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Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers

Can we imagine America without empire? The conditions for an affirmative answer are staggering.

Can we imagine America without big business and multinational enterprise? Without oil-based transportation? Without a vast military machine? Without scientific and educational communities dependent on that machine? Without a regressive tax system and fantastic disparities of wealth, ownership and power?

Can we conceive of this country functioning without a concentrated and utterly conformist national press? Without a labor movement populated with cold warriors and arms-enthusing bureaucrats? Without a popular culture organized around continuous consumption and the extermination of memory? Without pervasive racism? Without heroin and network TV?

Most Americans will follow their imaginations elsewhere. In 1980, those citizens not yet comatose with despair are more likely to be buying gold, practicing karate, flocking to disaster movies, or accepting Jesus as their personal savior.

But one should not lose faith in the American people. In at least one important respect their understanding of our political system is vastly superior to that of the scholars and media pundits who analyze it for a living. Save perhaps for the Holy Rollers, they realize that there is nothing in it for them.

They know, however imperfectly, that the elite core of both major parties is dominated by big business, and that the quadrennial charade of national elections has more to do with resolving conflicts within the business community than with the workings of mass democracy. They understand that the social bases of political parties, upon which scholars and journalists have lavished so much attention, are merely the detritus of a previous age, almost helpless to shape national politics in our own. And they will manifest this knowledge in the only way they can: by staying away from the polls in November.

Such massive disaffection cries out for sympathetic analysis and presents a momentous opportunity for those who hope to move American politics beyond the riddles of empire. But seizing that opportunity requires a preliminary effort of intellect and will.

Not least among the costs of empire are the dissociations of thought and action, opinion and performance, and language and reality that it codifies. There can be no mass renewal of America's democratic tradition until these dissociations are overcome—until we set aside the stale, misleading fictions of conventional liberalism and call things by their names. Whole worlds of captivating imagery must be lost along the way. There can be no more millionaire

Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers are members of the political science departments at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Rutgers University, respectively. Their column, The Political Economy, *appears regularly in* The Nation.

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The Democrats held their convention here in 1976.
Now they're coming back to do it all over again.

We Demand:

- **Funds to rebuild our cities, not for war, nuclear annihilation and support of dictatorships abroad.**
- **MORE affirmative action, not LESS, and an end to ALL forms of discrimination based on race, national origin, sex and sexual orientation.**

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Protest Outside Madison Square Garden

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"reformers." Tax cuts for the rich cannot be labeled "new populism" or "tax reform." The MX must die as a "defense" expenditure. And the ritual identification of Democrats with the "interests of labor" must cease.

We need to acquire a new and more discriminating vocabulary for describing the system of American politics as it really is: the business coalitions that drive it forward, the fragmentation of working people that has made it possible.

Such renovations of language and theory cannot guarantee the radical change Professor Williams calls for, but they are its necessary preconditions. Only when the structures of American politics are laid bare can thought be given to their transformation. Only upon naming something can we leave it.

If we forsake this effort, the perversions of American political language will continue to hold us prisoner. They may even find confirmation in their own bizarre reality. One day soon we might hear President Reagan trumpet another "war to end all wars," and make the terrible discovery that even American politicians sometimes speak the truth. □

Alan Wolfe

Maybe Eugene Debs asked the wrong question. It is not how we remain democratic without an empire but did we remain democratic with one. America, as Williams claims, received economic benefits from its expansion, but it paid a major political cost: Its government and party system were deprived of the ability to make choices.

Politics, like economics, deals with scarcity. Because no human community can obtain everything it wants at all times, people institute among themselves arrangements for establishing priorities (or have those arrangements established in their name). Given its imperial expansion, America never created those arrangements. Instead of making difficult choices, its policies were geared to convincing people that they could have everything they wanted. Americans were offered a deal difficult for most people to refuse: If they deprived themselves of their political character, they would be rewarded with economic abundance. The fantastic growth and vitality of the American economy was dependent upon a sick and emaciated polity. American democracy, understood as a vibrant system of discourse, collapsed, even as American capitalism triumphed.

In the face of extraordinary growth at home, passion and controversy were held to be ungrateful. In the face of imperial growth abroad, they were found to be illegal. Empire did indeed become a way of life—for the elite. For everyone else, the price paid for empire was the loss of citizenship.

There is one question now facing the American political system: Can the enormous gap between reality and what the American people think is reality be closed? As a result of decades, if not centuries, of empire, the world and the United States have moved in different directions. Everywhere outside of this country it is understood that politics involves the making of physical choices. Here the American people still are attracted to a political system that offers them everything, while living in an economic system that will not give it to them. The choice is fairly clear: They can live with their dreams and go down angrily or wake up and demand honesty from those who presume to govern in their name.

That honesty will not come from Ronald Reagan, a true imperial swashbuckler. The Republican Party has set itself on a collision course with reality, offering the American people dreams that simply cannot come true. Like the Democrats of the 1960s, the Republicans, if elected, will have no choice but to preside over a nightmare of their own creation.

This leaves the task to the Democratic Party, which at the moment is as busily engaged in denial as the Republican. Unlike Reagan, Jimmy Carter is aware of what must be done, which, in my view, makes his refusal to do so all the more reprehensible. To impose himself on us for another four years, Carter has become a demagogue who knows better, while Reagan is a demagogue who doesn't. Carter's nomination by the Democratic Party will subtract four years from the finite amount of time the United States has left in which to wake up.

There is only one thing worse than an empire: an empire that has lost its glory. As pathos replaces arrogance, the mood in America becomes increasingly ugly. We are, in Richard Nixon's metaphor, a crippled giant, too crippled to have our way anymore, yet gigantic enough to make the world pay for our loss. America was not a pleasant place when its empire was intact. Unless there is some change soon, it will be an even worse place as it learns that it is not as exempt from history as it had supposed. □

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Blair Clark

If "imperialism" were truly an evil arising directly from human sin, instead of a natural political phenomenon, however damaging both to those who impose it and those who must endure it, then there might be a point to the Williams essay.

But since he treats it as the American curse, "born and bred" in us from the start, there can be for him only personal, psychological ways to exorcise it and to achieve salvation through a strange kind of evangelism, which he invokes in inflated Whitmanese.

"Do you want to imagine a new America or do you want to preserve the empire?" he asks at the very end. To this question we must pose another: Could we and our "victims" imaginably be saved by such a crusade and be reborn in an innocence neither we nor any other people ever had? The answer is: Not in time.

The only solution to the problems Williams tries to raise is through democratic political action for change, as it always is. He seems to have given up on that. The moralistic answers he gives to the problems of "empire," with the most dubious historical evidence in support of his argument, are of no use at all. □

Blair Clark is contributing editor of The Nation.

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Marcus G. Raskin

In the history of the Peloponnesian wars, Thucydides has Pericles addressing the Athenians in their assembly immediately after the plague and at a time when the Athenians wanted to pull out of that disastrous war. Pericles stated some "facts of powers" to the Athenians which they accepted and which then resulted in their undoing. He told them of their greatness and how they were envied by all the known world. Then he said, in effect, that if any Athenians now wanted to play peace-lover, they should forget it. The Athenians, he said, were hated and they had to play out their destiny of coupling freedom (as it was then thought of) and empire. Twenty-five hundred years later, in a more crude time, but echoing similar sentiments, Lyndon Johnson spoke to the troops in Vietnam informing them that there were two hundred million "of us" and three billion "of them." "We got what they want and we can't let them have it."

The official United States lost that war in Indochina to the Vietnamese and the civil society at home. And with that loss there has been very little rethinking of what the official American role should be in the world, not only for others but for what would sustain freedom, economic well-being and personal dignity within the United States. There are those in both political parties who want to continue the charade of empire, and in this charade they are prepared to sacrifice much. In 1980 they have become parties to a gigantic rearmament *machomania* and drumbeaters for military intervention and first use of nuclear weapons. Their domestic policy is bottomed on extending the military and corporate machine but without offering anything to the labor movement. One wonders what this search for empire is in the name of. Since World War II, has the American leadership brought anything but heartache in its imperial thrust? Why should anyone want to recapture those halcyon days of a generation ago when the United States "lost" China and tied in Korea, when Vice President Richard Nixon was spat upon in Venezuela, when Cuban exiles lay wounded and dying on the beaches of the Bay of Pigs, at our urging, or when the United States engineered the coup and destruction of Mohammed Mossadegh for that brave and fearless leader, the late Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi?

What is a sensible course to follow now? Is there a way to move from triumphalism to a more moderate policy that acknowledges, as Williams has brilliantly noted, that all humankind, even the United States, lives in history controlled and dependent on others? First there has to be a forging of a strong domestic alliance based on reason, judgment and a passion for reality between liberals, the left and prudent members of the establishment who see clearly the dangers and the foolishness of triumphalism in this age. In the United States there are three groups that need one another and will work together for a more sensible foreign and national security policy.

(*1*) The pragmatists who hold high-level positions as lawyers, corporate officials, or government officials and who realize the foolishness of certain policies, including their corrupt self-serving underpinnings, and who realize that powerful nations do not have to stand in the way of positive social change and transformation, that they do not have to control events in other nations. These pragmatists, like Cyrus Vance and Paul Warnke, are aware that they can live with liberation movements. They, like Vance and Warnke, believe there is much justice to the position that the role of an American foreign policy is not to remake other nations, whether from a right, centrist, or left perspective. The pragmatists also know the limited value of military power and the futility of so-called intelligence and covert operations, another name for criminal activity in a host nation.

(*2*) The second group is composed of the idealists of the left who comprehend that America and American foreign policy is in a field, that America is not the center of a universe in which all nations change except the United States. This group believes that social transformation must go on within the United States and elsewhere. Therefore it seeks a policy of nonintervention and a national security policy that does not weigh down the American society. This group believes that the social transformation American society needs to go through, such as applying the human-rights covenant in the economic, social and political spheres, can only go forward if the United States adopts a nonimperialist foreign policy. The idealists know that the field of international relations requires the formation of world law and new international institutions. This is a difficult task which will necessitate internalizing United Nations resolutions into American laws and behavior. This will require that U.N. resolutions be taken more seriously, that we debate anti-apartheid, disarmament, anti-racism and economic equity resolutions. It will also mean that once we accept the development of world law and the importance of U.N. resolutions we can reject and criticize those resolutions that have a dangerous ring to them, such as the anti-Zionist resolution.

(*3*) The alliance must also be forged with the university community, the labor movement and various elements of the religious community, who will speak to the fact that military intervention and imperialism is not a way to build toward a plural world civilization. This group will also know that imperialism is not a way to generate internal economic democracy or the bonds of social cohesion and community which our nation needs more than ever. □

Marcus G. Raskin, author and co-founder of the Institute for Policy Studies, is a member of The Nation*'s Editorial Board and associate chairman of the New Democratic Coalition.*

Sidney Morgenbesser

Professor Williams's essay is important and timely. Today there are many who insist that the age of the American empire, or Pax Americana, is over, that Americans know it, that they realize America cannot be expected to play as dominant a role in world affairs as it once did because it has lost much of its economic strength or surplus. Such critics add that alternate policies pursued by Henry Kissinger and proposed by

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Ronald Reagan and intermittently by Jimmy Carter are self-defeating, based on erroneous beliefs, do not strengthen our security and do not enable us to satisfy legitimate needs of our citizens.

The arguments proposed are a mixture of moral and prudential ones. Williams elaborates many of them; he adds that the pursuit of empire is not the pursuit of noble aims, and that its ends are often accomplished at the expense of the legitimate rights and interests of others. Indeed, we may add, too often by morally horrifying policies.

So identified, his working definition equates the end of empire with the specification of certain restraints on admissible foreign policy—no policy is prima facie admissible if it violates the rights and the legitimate interests of others. (I include "prima facie" to allow for the possibility of conflict between rights.) Notice, however, that these restraints don't determine foreign policy; alternative ways are conceivable depending on the specification of legitimate interests and the rules, if any, for adjudicating conflict between them. It is clear which policies Williams wants to avoid; it is not clear whether the foreign policy pursued by Cyrus Vance in at least some parts of the globe met his requirements.

Notice further that the restraints suggested by Williams are not uniquely relevant for the guidance of foreign affairs; they can be applied to domestic policies as well. Indeed, some of his examples of imperial policies are domestic ones, and hence he leaves himself open to the objection that there are important differences between the cases he treats as essentially similar. But still, his usage does allow him to show the continuation between the use of imperious centralized power at home and abroad.

This reading of Williams's text, however, is not without difficulties. In some sections he talks of coming to live with empire, or dealing with empire in a responsible way. It is not clear how we can do these things without violating reasonable restraints. I suggest that in some instances Williams may tacitly be adopting the popular view according to which (roughly) a given country is the center of an empire if it acquires legal authority over states and people, and is imperialistic if those over whom authority is exercised are given limited, if any, authority. By extension, today we may say that a country is acting as the center of an empire or is imperial if it is acquiring power, influence and control over states and people.

The connection between these usages and Williams's official one is, I suppose, clear enough if we believe that every country that is the center of an empire is imperialistic, and further believe that it violates the interests and rights of those over whom it is exercising authority or power.

Many today do think that indeed such is the case, and may very well conclude, I think, that America should therefore be concerned only with the defense of its own borders and not enter into alliances, etc.; that it cannot be trusted once it tries to play an imperial role. I should add that there are many but obviously not all who are isolationists on different, essentially selfish grounds. They want us to be concerned only with our own interests. Therefore, it is not strange that often the isolationist of today is the imperialist of tomorrow.

Motivation aside, the isolationist position is not obviously right. The world would not, I think, be a better one if we withdrew from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, for example, and the arms race would not, I think, be diminished. Given the behavior of the Russians, isolationism combined with unilateral disarmament seems too morally risky, even to opponents of the arms race.

Of course, with suitable assumptions we can devise a benign form of isolationism, but with parallel ones we can devise a benign form of internationalism. And if our geopolitical and economic needs preclude the latter, so do they the former.

At all accounts, though isolationism may be compatible with Williams's position, it is not entailed by it; hence he can, I suppose, allow for the possibility of responsible empire, or of being imperial without being imperialistic. This could happen not out of benevolence but from rational self-interest or the coincidence of interests between the relevant states and groups. This countenances the possibility that Williams seems to allow that power does not always corrupt.

Williams could therefore be interpreted as calling for the end of empire only in the sense that the critics with whom we began do. But there is a difference. Despite his interpretation of our past and his realistic assessment of the behavior of nations, Williams remains quintessentially American and holds out hope for a New America. Some would hold out for hopes, even when eclipsed by despair, for a New World and would add that it is not a case of the triumph of hope over knowledge. Indeed, it is a firm belief of the great classical liberals that the realizability of a world of justice without rumor of war is not ruled out by any defensible theory of human nature.

But realism demands that we add the observation not only that these hopes may not be realized but also that the disjunction, America or Empire, is misleading. The demise of empire may be only a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the America Williams wants; conversely, a reasonable America is not a sufficient condition for a reasonable world. But I should stop before my hopes are overcome by realism and confusion. □

COMING

ARYEH NEIER
ON
LINDA LOVELACE

Richard Falk

Professor Williams is strikingly correct in his description of empire as a way of life for America. I will elaborate on his theme in two directions: first, some remarks suggesting a specific crisis of imperial strategy for the United States; second, reflections on whether the existence of a rival Soviet empire legitimately restricts our own freedom to renounce an imperial role in the world.

The American way of empire is by no means static. On the contrary, the nature of imperialism, its challenges and responses, is the central drama of our recent national history. In the decade ahead, the imperial impulse to control is likely to come up against a variety of revolutionary nationalisms in one or more important oil-producing

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countries. Indeed, the fear of such prospects underlies Jimmy Carter's adoption of an overtly militarist foreign policy. After the fall of the Shah in Iran at the outset of 1979, American leaders concluded that we must prevent the spread of radical anti-Westernism in the region. The Rapid Deployment Force (R.D.F.), bolstered by an increased American naval presence in the Indian Ocean, was planned as a mobile interventionary capability. Yet, as even Pentagon analysts have acknowledged, the R.D.F. is no more than a tripwire, behind which lies the *credible* threat to unleash nuclear war.

In the background, also, is the Soviet Union with emerging oil import needs of its own and the military hardware to challenge the United States *credibly* at the nonnuclear level in the Persian Gulf region. As a latecomer to Third World imperialism, the Soviet Union seems likely to follow the American lead of the last century in Asia and use its military prowess to insist upon "an open door" to resources. In contrast, the United States is likely to insist on exerting control over countries of traditional allegiance or vital resources, intervening when necessary to prevent hostile outcomes in selected internal struggles. There is a dangerous potential for conflict here, especially in the Persian Gulf region where the world oil game is being played out. Great wars, as a rule, begin not because one side is evil or headed by a demented leader but because both sides are "reasonable," yet inconsistently so.

Here, then, is the distinctive point. The American way of empire can be sustained in the 1980s only by accepting the increasing likelihood of nuclear war as the price of national security. Such a position is desperate in two senses. It raises the risks of empire to intolerable levels and it suggests that the tactics of moderate imperial control are breaking down all over the world, not only in the Middle East.

At the same time, we have in Moscow a rival overextended empire, which is also confused about its identity since it exists alongside an ideology that disavows imperial ambitions. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, as well as earlier interventions in Eastern Europe, dramatizes the imperial outlook in the Kremlin, its militarist underpinnings and its sham ideological character. Imagine the outrageous claim of an invitation from Hafizullah Amin in Kabul as the basis for the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan when in fact the murder of Amin and his replacement by Babrak Karmal were the immediate undertakings of the invading Soviet troops. Yet Americans should not feel morally superior, considering our official complicity in the murders of Patrice Lumumba and Ngo Dinh Diem, as well as the elaborate attempts during the 1960s to arrange the assassination of Fidel Castro.

It is the logic of an imperial enemy that keeps even moderate Americans willing to support an escalating defense budget in an inflationary economy. This logic rests on a deep, perhaps deliberate, confusion. The genuine Soviet threat to American security, even assuming the worst, is cheaply nullified by American strategic weaponry. To contend, however, that this strategic rivalry with the Soviet Union justifies our imperial determination to smash revolutionary nationalist movements is to allow genuine concerns of national security to shade over into imperialist geopolitics. Of course, this separation of national security and imperialist geopolitics is not entirely possible, but the image of Communist encirclement via Third World radicalization is essentially misleading. Even more confusing is the belief that national revolutions can be smashed by a military approach, that is, an approach that operates to some extent at the strategic level.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries things were different. We won. We could smash national revolutions at will. The only question was one of endorsing the imperial ethic in action, as in the bloody military campaigns carried out in Latin America and the Philippines. In a sense, the Vietnam War was a turning point for a variety of complex reasons. It was our first experience of genuine imperial defeat, although Castro's earlier victory suggested the strength of national revolutions directed against brutal and corrupt domestic dictatorships. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution has been a further confirmation of the lesson that national revolutions can no longer be defeated by military means alone.

Because Persian Gulf oil appears so vital for the capitalist sector of the world economy, we seem unable and unwilling to acknowledge the futility of a strategy of military containment. Indeed, we seek to disguise this futility by pretending that the Soviet Union, and not the peoples of the region, is the enemy. One cost of doing this is to raise greatly the risk of general war without adding very much to the prospect of retaining Western control over the oil. In fact, it is arguable that the increasingly visible American presence in the Persian Gulf will help catalyze and radicalize various tendencies toward self-determination active in the region.

If we ask what can be done, the answers seem obvious. Go with the flow of history. Let revolutionary nationalism run its course. As Afghanistan suggests, the Russians can't intervene successfully in the Third World either. There is no Soviet danger. Of course, relaxation overseas needs to be accompanied by reforms at home, including drastic conservation of energy and an alternative-energy development program. Such a nonimperialist adjustment makes sense, even economically, in terms of world peace in the nuclear age.

Why, then, won't it happen? Here is where Williams is particularly helpful. We are victims of our own imperial frame of mind. Our various Caesars, in and out of office, cannot envision security without control, nor control without the military means to exert it. Empire is a habit of mind which has been deeply embedded in the mainstream of our political consciousness from the very outset of our national existence.

Can we break free? In some sense, pushing the imperial enterprise to the nuclear break point may have a healthy shock effect. And perhaps, also, the economic crunch will, at last, lead the press to engage in an oppositional politics that reflects its interests. As matters now stand, neither major political party has anything to offer the American people by way of response. It seems like the moment for a genuine progressive anti-imperial politics to be born—one that reconstructs American destiny on some basis other than making the world safe for the multinational corporation and its banking and military-industrial complex auxiliaries. □

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

There Must Be More to Love Than Death:
A Conversation With Kurt Vonnegut

ROBERT K. MUSIL

This conversation with Kurt Vonnegut is one in a series of interviews Robert K. Musil has conducted on the subject of American culture and the bomb. Hans Bethe, David Lilienthal and George F. Kennan are among the others who have been interviewed.

Musil: It must have been difficult to work up to a book like *Slaughterhouse Five*. How long did you think about describing an experience like Dresden?

Vonnegut: Well, it seemed a categorical imperative that I write about Dresden, the firebombing of Dresden, since it was the largest massacre in the history of Europe and I am a person of European extraction and I, a writer, had been present. I *had* to say something about it. And it took me a long time and it was painful. The most difficult thing about it was that I had forgotten about it. And I learned about catastrophes from that, and from talking to other people who had been involved in avalanches and floods and great fires, that there is some device in our brain which switches off and prevents our remembering catastrophes above a certain scale. I don't know whether it is just a limitation of our nervous system, or whether it's actually a gadget which protects us in some way. But I, in fact, remembered nothing about the bombing of Dresden although I had been there, and did everything short of hiring a hypnotist to recover the information. I wrote to many of the guys who went through it with me saying "Help me remember" and the answer every time was a refusal, a simple flat refusal. They did not want to think about it. There was a writer in *Life* magazine—I don't know how much he knows about rabbits and the nervous system—who claimed that rabbits have no memory, which is one of their defensive mechanisms. If they recalled every close shave they had in the course of just an hour, life would become insupportable. As soon as they'd escaped from a Doberman pinscher, why, they forgot all about it. And they could scarcely afford to remember it.

Musil: Did the details come back to you personally when you wrote to people and studied about Dresden? You said it was painful when you started thinking about it again.

Vonnegut: After all, it was a city enormous in area and I was on the ground, and there was smoke and fire, and so I could scarcely see eight feet, and the only way to see it would be on area photographs taken with the beautiful equipment that planes had. And so it was finally British military historians who produced more and more information and finally an estimate of the casualties. East Germany would not respond to my inquiries at all. They weren't interested in the problem. Probably the most curious thing, in retrospect, is that I think that I'm the only person who gives a damn that Dresden was bombed, because I have found no Germans to mourn the city, no Englishmen. I have run into flyers of one sort or another who were in on the raid. They were rather sheepish about it, and they weren't proud of it. But I have found no one who is sorry, including the people who were bombed, although they must surely mourn relatives. I went back there with a friend and there was no German to say, "Ach, how beautiful this used to be, with the tree-lined streets and the parks." They don't give a damn. And there was a special edition of *Slaughterhouse Five* that the Franklin Library brought out. For that, I had to write a special introduction for their subscribers, and I figured out that I'm the only person who profited from the bombing of Dresden. I estimated at the time I got about $4 for each person killed.

Musil: In the course of doing this series, I've interviewed people who have observed massive bombing. You weren't a bomber, but you had direct experience with bombing. I wonder if your experience in Dresden led you to any special interest (that's a bloodless way of saying it) in Hiroshima, or in subjects like nuclear weapons. Is there some connection in your mind, as in *Cat's Cradle*?

Vonnegut: Well, the interest would have been there in any event, I think. Dresden wasn't all that instructive. It was a coincidence in my life. But I think I would have been a pacifist anyway. I'm technologically educated—I'm educated as a chemist, not as a writer. I was studying chemistry at the time and was from a technocratic family. During the Depression we really believed that scientists and engineers should be put in charge and that a technological utopia was possible. My brother, who is nine years older than I am, became a distinguished scientist. He's Dr. Bernard Vonnegut, who got a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The flashiest thing he discovered was that silver iodide will make it snow and rain. That's his patent. He is actually a leading atmospheric chemist now.

But for me it was terrible, after having believed so much in technology and having drawn so many pictures of dream automobiles and dream airplanes and dream human dwellings, to see the actual use of this technology in destroying a city and killing 135,000 people and then to see the even more sophisticated technology in the use of nuclear weapons on Japan. I was sickened by this use of the technology that I had had such great hopes for. And so I came to fear it. You know, it's like being a devout Christian and then seeing some horrible massacres conducted by Christians after a victory. It was a spiritual horror of that sort which I still carry today. . . .

Musil: You mentioned religious and philosophical values. At the end of *Cat's Cradle*, Bokonon is talking about writing the history of human stupidity . . .

Vonnegut: There actually is a book called that, you know. It's called the

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Short Introduction to the History of Human Stupidity, by Walter Pitkin, and it was published during the '30s. The most horrible hypocrisy or the most terrifying hypocrisy or the most tragic hypocrisy at the center of life, I think, which no one dares mention, is that human beings don't like life. Bertrand Russell skirted that, and many psychoanalysts have too, in talking about people lusting for death. But I think that at least half the people alive, and maybe nine-tenths of them, really do not like this ordeal at all. They pretend to like it some, to smile at strangers, and to get up each morning in order to survive, in order to somehow get through it. But life is, for most people, a very terrible ordeal. They would just as soon end it at any time. And I think that is more of a problem really than greed or machismo or anything like that. You know, you talk about the dark side of life: that's really it. Most people don't want to be alive. They're too embarrassed, they're disgraced, they're frightened. I think that's the fundamental thing that's going on. Those of you with your devotion to peace and all that are actually facing people perhaps as brave and determined and resourceful and thoughtful as you are on some level. And what they really want to do is to have the whole thing turned off like a light switch.

Musil: So would you consider yourself a fatalist? Throughout your books, there is the phrase, "So it goes." But what is that theme, that leitmotif? What does it indicate about your own thinking about where we're headed, armed with our nuclear weapons?

Vonnegut: When I'm engaged in any action I have to take into consideration that many of the people on either side of me don't care what happens next. I am mistrustful of most people as custodians of life and so I'm pessimistic on that account. I think that there are not many people who want life to go on. And I'm just a bearer of bad tidings really. You know, I just got born myself and this is what I found on this particular planet. But life is very unpopular here, and maybe it will be different on the next one.

Musil: *Cat's Cradle* features a narrator who is ostensibly working on a book about the day the bomb went off at Hiroshima, and trying to find out what the people did, including great scientists like Dr. Felix Hoenikker, your fictional father of the bomb. What is the germ of that novel, and why did you pick that kind of focus?

Vonnegut: I was a public relations man for the General Electric Company's research laboratory, which happens to be an extremely interesting research laboratory. As General Electric found out, it was very profitable to hire scientists from M.I.T. or Princeton or wherever and say, "Hey, you don't have to teach anymore; you can do research all day long, and we won't tell you what to do. We will simply buy you the equipment." The job required my visiting the scientists often and talking to them and asking them what they were up to. Every so often a good story would come out of it. I got to know these people, and the older ones began to trouble me a lot; not the younger ones, but the older ones began to believe the truth must be served and that they need not fear whatever they turned up in the course of their research. And a man that my brother worked with there, a Nobel Prize winner named Irving Langmuir, was more or less the model for Dr. Felix Hoenikker. Langmuir was absolutely indifferent to the uses that might be made of the truths he dug out

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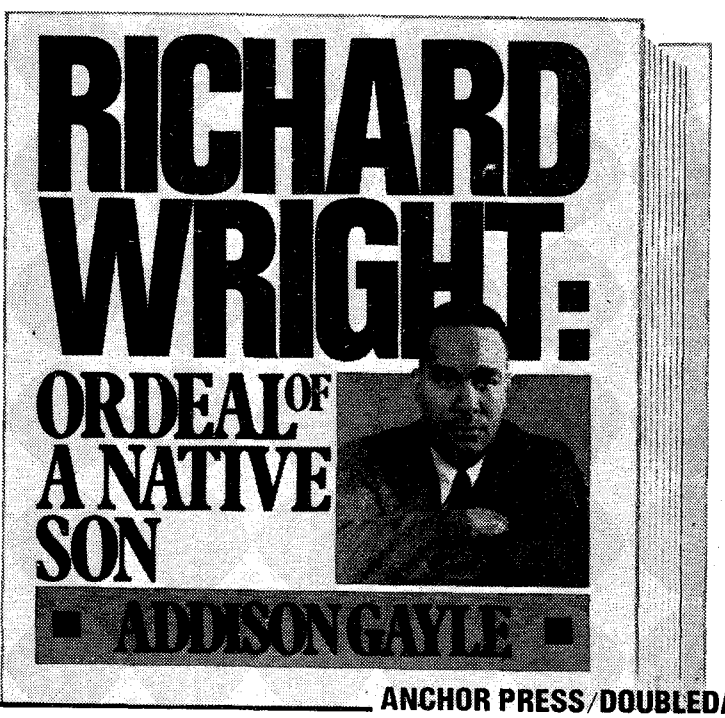

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of the rock and handed out to whomever was around. But any truth he found was beautiful in its own right, and he didn't give a damn who got it next.

I think we live more according to literary stereotypes and dramatic stereotypes than we know. I think there were literary models then of pure scientists and their absent-mindedness, and jokes about the absent-minded professor and all that, and many scientists gladly fell into this stereotype of absent-mindedness and indifference, including indifference as to what became of their discoveries. That generation was not cautious at all about what information it turned over to the Government, to the War Department, to the Secretary of the Army or whomever. But one member of that generation, Norbert Weiner, published an article in *The Atlantic* not long after the war was over, saying, "I'm not going to tell my Government anything anymore." And I think scientists have become more and more cautious since. I know my brother has. He was deeply chagrined to find out that the Air Force had been spewing silver iodide all over Vietnam in an effort to bring those people to their knees. You know this is preposterous. He says they might as well have been spewing paprika or something like that, hoping this would have some horrible effect on the enemy. But it sickened him to hear that they had hoped that his invention would have some destructive use.

Musil: If one of the problems as you saw it after the war was technocrats gone wild, what alternative do you propose in your literature or in your own thinking? What did you decide was the opposite or the antidote to the Felix Hoenikkers of the world?

Vonnegut: Well, I encourage restraint. I think the trouble with Dresden was restraint surely, or lack of restraint, and I don't regard technocrats as having gone mad. I think the politicians went mad, as they often do. The man responsible for the bombing of Dresden against a lot of advice was Winston Churchill. It's the brain of one man, the rage of one man, the pride of one man, and I really can't hold scientists particularly responsible for that.

Musil: But you do say, or at least the narrator says in *Cat's Cradle*, that Hoenikker couldn't have been all that innocent if he was the father of the A-bomb.

Vonnegut: Well, what I feel about him now is that he was allowed to concentrate on one part of life more than any human being should be allowed to do. He was overspecialized and became amorai on that account. It would seem perfectly all right to see a musician vanish into his own world entirely. But if a scientist does this, he can inadvertently become a very destructive person.

Musil: How do you view a subject like the threat of nuclear war? Do you think the threat is increasing and do you worry about that?

Vonnegut: Well, yes, indeed I do. I worry again about the indifference of people to it. You can talk about the various readings of *Dr. Strangelove* in that movie, and I tell you that the thing that satisfied the audience most was the beautiful end of the world, and playing that sentimental song over it. It was meant to be irony, but to most people in the audience and on most people's level it was beautiful. And I don't mean simple-minded people. I mean that this was stirring and lovely and appealing—the end of the world—and did not cause anyone to recoil from it. Now, there has been one bombing picture which does make you recoil from war, which is *The War Game*. That was extraordinary, and that was intolerable to people because it revealed how slow the death was going to be, the slow death of children and that sort of thing. That was bad news to people, but the peaceful end, the painless end was deeply gratifying to people, more so than all the Peter Sellers acting triumphs, more than the great Keenan Wynn jokes or shooting the coin box off the Coca-Cola machine. I'm afraid that beautiful ending is the reason that picture is so loved. Inadvertently, or maybe on purpose, Kubrick made a picture which sent people home utterly satisfied. And I'm sure that everyone that ever sees that picture sleeps soundly afterward and feels nothing more needs to be done.

Musil: How about your books, particularly *Slaughterhouse Five*? How do you think people react to the sort of destruction depicted there?

Vonnegut: I have really no way of knowing. I haven't talked to that many readers, but I do hear from young people who say, "My father says the war wasn't that way at all." And the German response to it has been, "No, no, the war wasn't like that." Of course, damn it, I did as good research as they did about what the war was like and what the bombing of Dresden was like. But the Germans feel, you know, it's more or less their copyrighted war, and how dare I comment on it.

Musil: Apart from your role as a writer, do you concern yourself in other ways with the matter of nuclear weapons and their proliferation?

Vonnegut: Well, for one thing, I've reproduced. I have children and I'm very fond of them and I want them to like life. I don't want them to lose heart. As for nuclear weapons, I can't imagine why anyone wants them. I don't want my country to have them. I don't want anybody to have them. And there's no point in going country by country by country because if they exist anywhere, they threaten the entire planet. So I don't want my planet to have them, and I think the people who don't feel they are particularly dangerous must be imbeciles or hypocrites. Or again, perhaps they're sick enough to want an end to life.

Musil: But what about a lively man like John F. Kennedy? Have you thought about his behavior during the Cuban missile crisis and ever wondered what was going on with someone who could sit there and say, Well, we might just have to do it?

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Vonnegut: Well, this is the hypocrisy I'm talking about. When I see people with a lust for life climbing mountains or going hand over hand and doing these great acts of derring-do, showing their teeth, you know, and gnashing their teeth and loving steaks and loving women and loving whiskey and loving all of this, I become somewhat alarmed because I think perhaps that is a symptom of the hypocrisy—a person who pretends to like life and in fact overdoes it as though he or she had something to hide.

Musil: Since you have spent many years trying to understand both an event like the bombing of Dresden and the nature of scientists who could make Ice Nine or father atomic bombs, what do you think about when you hear the language of policy makers, people who talk about the bomb or nuclear weapons as a deterrent and so on?

Vonnegut: Only about their willingness to lie, it being a normal part of politics to lie. I have a friend I went through the war with. We were scouts together, and then we were prisoners of war together. He's since become a district attorney in Pennsylvania; he's a guy named Bernie O'Hare. We came home on a troopship together and got off at Newport News. I said, "All right, what did you learn from it?" meaning World War II. We were both privates. He thought a minute and said, "I'll never believe my Government again."

During the '30s when we grew up, we did believe our Government and were great enthusiasts for it because the economy was being reborn. We were such cooperative citizens that it turned out to be a rather minor thing that made us decide that we couldn't believe our Government anymore—that we had caught it lying. It was quite something to catch your Government lying then. What it was all about was our bombing techniques. They said we had these magnificent bombsights which would allow us to drop a bomb down a smoke stack, and that there was all this microsurgery going on on the ground. Then we saw what it really was. They would send a cloud of airplanes over and bomb the shit out of everything. There was no use of bombsights whatsoever, there was simply carpet bombing. And that was kept secret from the American people: the nature of the air raids and random bombings, the shooting and the blowing up of anything that moved.

Musil: Did you accept the official Truman-Stimson explanation of the bombing of Hiroshima at first, or was that a fairly transparent lie to you?

Vonnegut: I had already gotten off the troopship. I was liberated in May and didn't get home until the middle of June. But the bomb was dropped in August, and I was home on leave then. I had seen bombings, so when Truman spoke of marshaling yards and all these other military targets that had to be hit there in Hiroshima, I knew what bullshit it was, because anything is a marshaling yard, any building that stands is an offense, any wire that still hangs between two poles is an offense. But there are all these names that can be given to them. What sticks in my mind is that Truman had talked about the targets we had been after at Hiroshima, and spoke of the marshaling yards. You know there are marshaling yards in New York and there are marshaling yards in Indianapolis and there are marshaling yards in South Bend. I think they're just railroad yards, but there's this terrible thing if you marshal in them.

Musil: To move to the present, when you heard Jimmy Carter say in his inaugural address, "We hope to move toward our ultimate goal of zero nuclear weapons," did you automatically dismiss the statement? Do you think the public has begun to expect dishonest language from Government leaders?

Vonnegut: Well, it's *thoughts* which are not taken seriously now. Orwell dealt in detail with language and the misuse of words. But he's talking about euphemisms, which is just disguising an unpleasant truth. As a matter of fact, if you go over a euphemistic sentence and put it into street English, well, then you can learn from it. You can simply decode it and get an offensive truth out of it. But I'm just talking about lies. There's no need for euphemisms anymore. The day of euphemisms is over. Now we hear total untruths. So there's no way to really crack the code except to suspect that the intent was to deceive.

Musil: Let me turn to a final question. Is there a way to let people know about the nuclear threat, really know that the world may blow up, without turning them off psychologically? Suppose I came to you for advice and said, "Look, I would like to alert people that

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there are these nuclear weapons out there and I might do a movie or write some poetry or go give speeches—how can it best be done?"

Vonnegut: You are, and people like you are, crying in the wilderness and everything else is a rock or a tree, I think. And again, as I say, there are very few enthusiasts for life. It's as though you were just crazy about mah-jongg. If everybody would play mah-jongg again, this might bring back the mah-jongg rage of the '20s. And, Jesus, nobody else will look at the tiles or pay any attention; they don't care. They're not into that particular sport, and your particular sport is survival. It's one more game, and most people don't care to play it.

Musil: What does that lead *you* to conclude? Since your experience in World War II, we've gone from block-busters, then single, so-called puny atomic bombs of only twelve kilotons, to megatons, and now there are some 50,000 of them in the world. Do you ever think personally, "We're not going to make it"?

Vonnegut: Well, we have made it. I mean, here we are. We're still alive, aren't we? We have survived, and how long we're supposed to do this, I don't know. It seems to me the whole world is living like Alcoholics Anonymous now, which is one day at a time, and it seems to me that President Carter is living that way too. Every night when he goes to bed he cackles, "By God, we made it through another day! Everybody said I was a lousy President, and here we've survived another day. That's not bad." We are living day by day by day now, but there seems to be very little restraint in the world. What an alcoholic does every day is not take a drink, and only not take a drink for a day. But I see no such real restraint with regard to war-like actions. If we were truly interested in surviving, and having sobriety, each day we would congratulate ourselves not for merely having gotten through another day but for making it without a warlike gesture. But there is no such restraint. More weapons are manufactured every day and more arguments are gladly entered into and more enormous, dangerous lies are told, so there is no restraint. It would be truly wonderful if we could live as alcoholics do, to be unwarlike for just another day. We don't. We're totally warlike, and sooner or later something's going to go wrong. The book I'm working on now is about a kid, he's grown now, grown and in his 40s and his father was a gun nut. It was a house with dozens of guns in it. At the age of 11 this kid was playing with one of his father's guns, which he wasn't supposed to do, put a cartridge into a 30-06 rifle and fired out a goddamn attic window and killed a housewife, you know, eighteen blocks away, just drilled her right between the eyes. And this has colored his whole life, and made his reputation. And of course this weapon should not have existed. He was brought into a planet where this terribly unstable device existed, and all he had to do was sneeze near it. I mean, it wanted to be fired; it was built to be fired. It had no other purpose than to be fired and the existence of such an unstable device within the reach of any sort of human being is intolerable. □

FILMS

ROBERT HATCH

The Great Santini
Les Petites Fugues

Early comment on *The Great Santini* has been eloquent about the performances, singly and in concert, of Robert Duvall, Michael O'Keefe and Blythe Danner. It is the right emphasis, for these three, supported by a generally able cast, are notably superior to the story in which they work. Though it may aspire to more, the film is a soap opera, by which I mean that it submits a family to shattering blows that somehow fail of their predictable effect. The characters have the resilience of punching bags; they resemble the protagonists of a Tom and Jerry cartoon. And yet, under the direction of Lewis John Carlino (who also wrote the script, from a novel by Pat Conroy), the level of performance is so high, the actors take such risks and play against one another with such nice judgment as to how far they dare go without ripping through the fragile story, that they invest sentimentality with at least momentary authority.

Duvall is Col. Bull Meechum, self-styled the Great Santini, a Marine combat pilot who, in 1962, lacks a target for his lust for battle. Frustrated to the brink of sanity, he has turned bully, an alcoholic bully given to revolting practical jokes and to hammering into his wife and children the athletic conceit and iron discipline that he conceives to be the essence of Marine superiority to all the lesser breeds. Meechum sees himself as a gladiator, a dangerous model in an age when one can expect to live far beyond one's physical peak. He is 43 and his son (O'Keefe) is just turning 18. It is evident that one of them would have destroyed the other, so implacable is the rivalry that the Great Santini imposes on their relationship, if the film had not arranged a hero's death for the aging champion.

In retrospect, Bull Meechum is a tolerable human being because his son, though drilled and threatened, goaded and ridiculed apparently from childhood, is seen to be a splendid young man, competent, reliable, warm in his sympathies, just in his dealings and, except when driven to hysteria by his father, moderate in his actions. The film insists that the Meechums are a loving family, but it doesn't search deeply enough to explain how that could possibly be so. Supported by memory and her religion (the Meechums are Catholic), a wife such as Lillian Meechum might still be able to see the man she married beneath the tyrant he has become and to save her children from disaster. At least Danner exhibits the poise and patience to make it seem possible. But her role is not given enough substance to balance Duvall's pyrotechnics, and the son and elder daughter (Lisa Jane Persky), though their parts develop with lovely clarity and courage, never convinced me. Children have no defense against an ogre parent except to withdraw, and the Meechum young keep punching. They seem to endorse the Santini assumption that children, like sabers, improve with beating.

What irritates me about *The Great Santini* is that, like many other allegedly serious films, it takes up a valid theme (in this case the havoc caused by a man who has never subdued his infantile drives to power), engages a cast capable of exploring it to some purpose and then trivializes the material in the interest of popular entertainment. After Bull Meechum's funeral, the family drives off into a promising future, praising his name. No real damage has been done; those scenes of screaming panic that still ring in our ears were mere playacting. But the actors had made them seem more than play. They had keyed one's expectations to an arresting drama that the shallow script did not provide.

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Yves Yersin's *Les Petites Fugues* (translated as "The Little Escapes," though I think "Little Escapades" comes closer) is a strikingly beautiful movie. That is not a difficult achievement if you are filming in the rich Swiss farm country, but the picture is handsome in its details as well as its landscapes. Yersin has an eye for what composes well; his shots are crisp and expressive. Obviously he knows he is good at that sort of thing: some of the finer shots are let run so long that you seem to hear a self-satisfied *Voilà*! Still, it is a lovely album (Robert Alazraki directed the photography).

Beyond that, it is a little difficult to adjust to the film. It adopts a formula not unusual in French-language movies: some elderly person, resigned for decades to plod along in nonentity, decides at last to kick up his or her heels. Specifically, Pipe (Michel Robin), who has been a farmhand all his life, saves his old-age pension until he can buy a motor bike, and thus mounted sets off on the small adventures that his hard-pressed and short-tempered employer sees as evidence of senile irresponsibility. They are more than that, for Pipe is a romantic. A photograph of the Matterhorn hangs above his bed and before the story ends he has hired a helicopter (his pension must be substantial, for his wages are low) to fly him around the peak. The trip disappoints the old man; his Alp is composed of mere stone and ice and he had expected magic.

At the farm, Pipe is the leader of the romantics, composed also of the family's daughter and an Italian laborer. The opposing party, the farmer, his wife and a son who is soon to take over, are the realists. The atmosphere is not easy in this idyllic setting, and that would seem a promising situation for a wry comedy. But jolly films that spring from the liberating rascality of advancing age require an endearing figure at the center, and Robin's old man is not one of them. He projects for the most part a stubborn determination to be difficult; his cavortings look less exuberant than dangerous to his health and his eyes have a boarish cast. Pipe did not at all strike me as a nice old fellow, and I had to nudge myself into laughing at his antics.

Meanwhile, the other characters are engaged in a complex and heated drama, involving primarily the daughter's interest in the Italian and the growing tension between the father and his ambitious, impatient son. But we see these developments in fragments, over Pipe's shoulder, as it were, and they never quite come into focus. Yersin's farm folk are an inarticulate lot, which is reasonable enough, but he has let that quality pervade the film. The people around Pipe seem more interesting than they are allowed to become; they are played by a strong cast. I wanted to be drawn into the picture, to be pleased by its humor and sensible of its bite. Instead I found myself straining to see around obstacles set up by its style. Yersin is aware of the dramatic uses of ambiguity and ellipses, but he doesn't employ those tricky devices as capably as he puts frames around bucolic scenes. □

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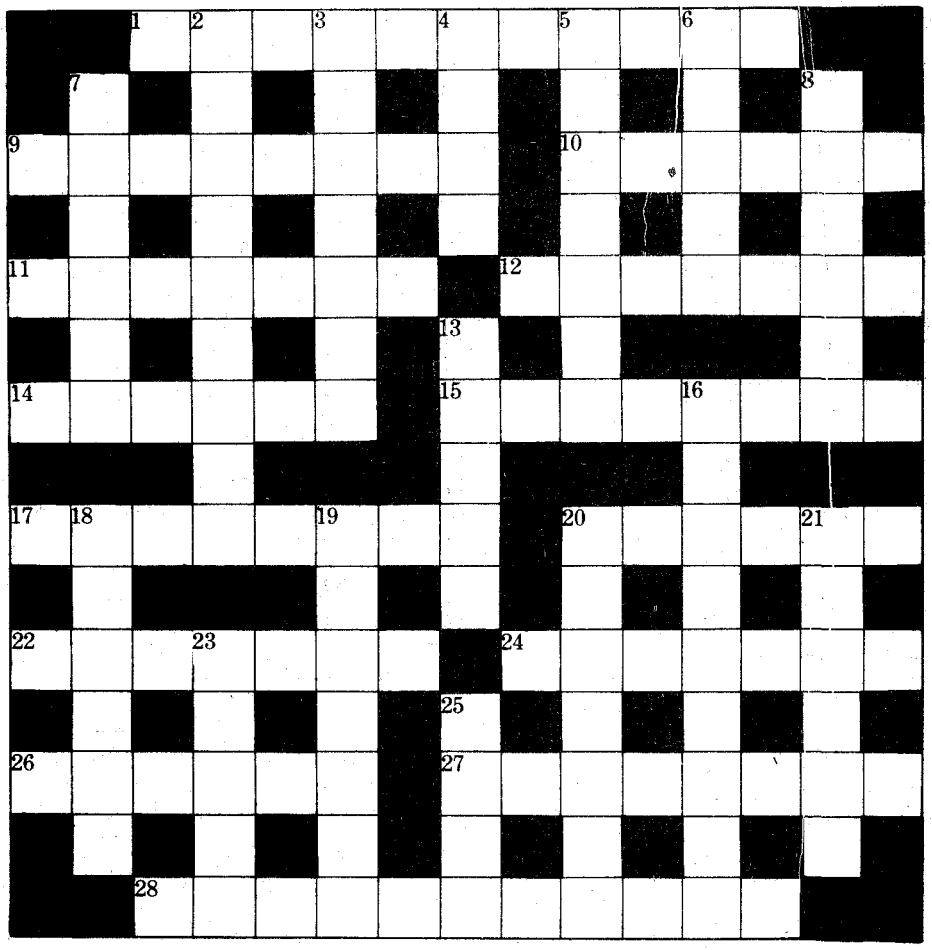

ACROSS

1 Not an amateur job, but voters endorsed a number with this. (11)
9 One might find talesmen here. (A result of accident, possibly!) (8)
10 Gets up a sign of spring around one of the poles. (6)
11 She acts badly, which may leave an odor. (7)
12 Top worker in the silk industry? (7)
14 Come to the meeting and listen! (6)
15 and 20 across Line-up, possibly, of an exact correspondence on public procession. (8,6)
17 Miles of sand, this! (8)
20 See 15 across
22 A petty quarrel with me and Jolson—which is common with a relation. (7)
24 Bad lesions under foot, possibly. (7)
26 Elsie's cud once showed something of value. (6)
27 "Mister" might be an equivalent—if you like the little squirt! (8)
28 Nazis used to do it with a "Heil!" (We still might see one on the field, possibly asking for a locomotive.) (5,6)

DOWN

2 When? (The form is crude, if so.) (5-4)
3 and 8 down Something that hurts Mr. Kennedy to abandon in Arizona? (7,6)
4 Certainly one band that gets around! (4)
5 Stroll around like pirates, of a sort. (7)
6 On and on, going around I find—in the soup? (5)
7 Diplomats should be so versed, remaining unaltered. (6)
8 See 3 down
13 and 25 Strangely enough, it's day that breaks some time after this. (9)
16 The flagrant error I zero in on contains what many guerrilla groups do. (9)
18 See 23 down
19 Do golfers get so depressed? (2,1,4)
20 The opposite of a boxer, certainly—alternatively, it's in that cute little animal! (7)
21 One's schedule might be fast at times. (6)
23 and 18 down In depressing letters, one doesn't need to watch. (Only a chauvinistic male boss would do so incorrectly!) (5,6)
25 See 13 down

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1830

ACROSS: 1 Abash; 4 Upward; 11 Indrawn; 12 Abridge; 13 Roughshod; 14 Yards; 15 United we stand; 17 All in good time; 22 Panic; 24 Ourselves; 25 Clients; 26 Workbag; 27 Signet; 28 Ember. DOWN: 2 Bedouin; 3 Spaghetti; 6 Andiron; 7 Dressy; 8 Fiery; 9 In the doghouse; 10 and 23 Paddle your own canoe; 16 To the brim; 18 and 5 Landing party; 19 Movable; 20 Spices; 21 Usage.

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